

EMIL LUDWIG

THE NILE

Books by Emil Ludwig

BISMARCK

DIANA

GENIUS AND CHARACTER

GIFTS OF LIFE

GOETHE

HINDENBURG

JULY 1914

KAISER WILHELM II

LEADERS OF EUROPE

LINCOLN

NAPOLEON

ON MEDITERRANEAN SHORES

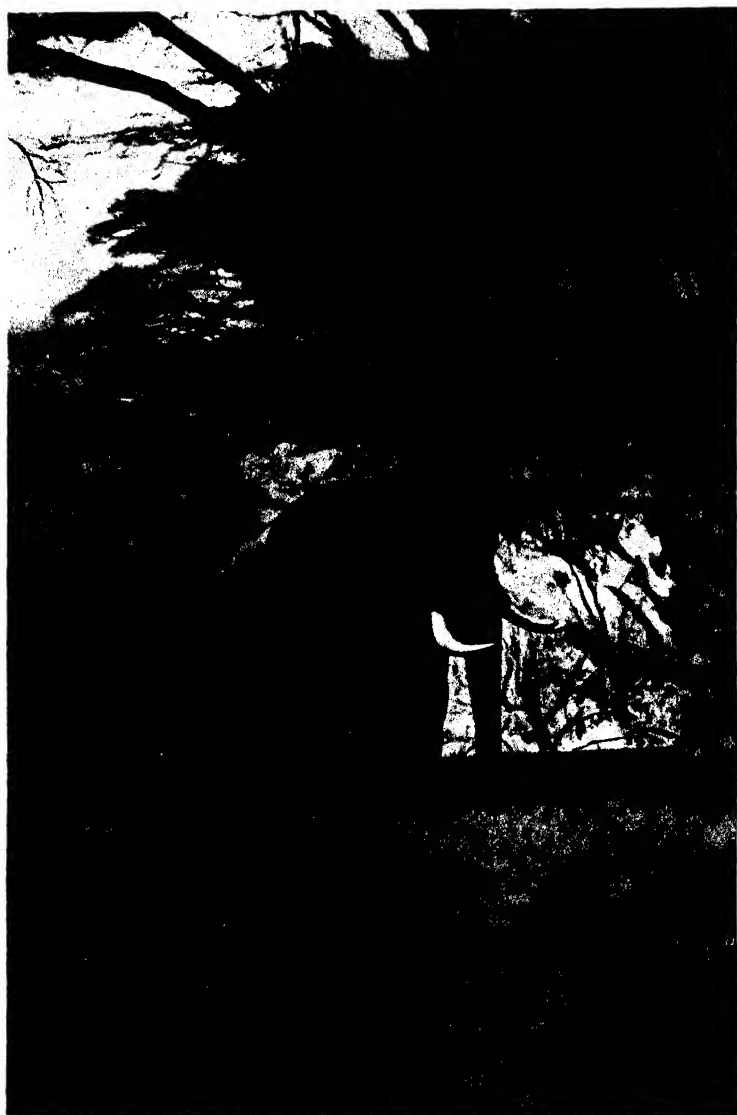
THE PRACTICAL WISDOM OF GOETHE

SCHLIEMANN OF TROY

SON OF MAN

TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

THREE TITANS



A PREHISTORIC MONSTER

EMIL LUDWIG.
THE NILE

The Life-Story of a River

FROM THE SOURCE TO EGYPT

Translated by
MARY H. LINDSAY

WITH 29 PLATES
AND COLOURED MAPS

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*The German original, "Der Nil. Lebenslauf eines
Stromes," first published 1935 in Amsterdam*

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PART ONE

From the Source to Egypt

PART TWO

The Nile in Egypt

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TO
ELGA LUDWIG
the African

Thus do they, sir: they take the flow o' the Nile
By certain scales i' the pyramid; they know,
By the height, the lowness, or the mean, if dearth,
Or foison, follow: the higher Nilus swells,
The more it promises: as it ebbs, the seedsman
Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,
And shortly comes to harvest.

Antony and Cleopatra, II, 7

FOREWORD

EVERY time I have written the life of a man, there has hovered before my mind's eye the image, physical and spiritual, of a river, but only once have I beheld in a river the image of man and his fate. When, at the end of 1924, I first saw the Great Dam at Assouan, its symbolic significance burst upon me with such force that I seemed to comprehend the River Nile forwards and backwards from this crucial point in its course. A mighty element had been tamed by human ingenuity so that the desert should bring forth fruit, an achievement which the centenarian Faust had attempted as the highest attainable to man in the service of his fellow-men. The thought of the end of *Faust*, as it stood embodied before my eyes in Assouan, fired me with the thought of writing the epic of the Nile as I had written the story of great men—as a parable.

But before I could tell the story of its adventures, and reveal their deeper meaning, I had to know the river from end to end, so that I might confirm or correct this vision in its detail. I had long known other parts of Africa. I loved that continent, because it had brought me happiness: even before the war I had seen on the equator the source of the Nile. But not until I set out to study it did it stand revealed as the most wonderful of all rivers.

This, the greatest single stream on earth, is yet by no means the most abundant, a fact which determines its whole life and that of its basin. It flows through the desert; for half of its course it receives neither tributaries nor rain, yet it does not dry up; indeed, close to its end, it creates the most fertile of all lands. In its youth, it dissipates its finest powers, yet it arrives at its mouth with might. Though it

waters a tenth of the earth's surface, it maintains the simplest form of all rivers; save for a single loop, it flows straight from south to north, and over a length of 2,750 miles, varies only 250 feet in breadth, so that, at the end, its mouth lies almost on the same degree of longitude as its source.

Its basin contains the biggest lake of the eastern hemisphere, the highest mountains, the biggest town of its continent. Its banks are peopled by the richest bird life of the northern hemisphere, by nearly every animal species known to Paradise, by vegetation ranging from Alpine flora and the tropical forest, through swamp, steppe, and desert to the richest arable land on earth. It feeds hundreds of different races, men of the mountain and men of the marsh, Arabs, Christians and cannibals, pigmies and giants. The struggles of these men for power and wealth, for faith and custom, for the supremacy of colour, can be traced farther back here than anywhere else in the history of mankind—for six thousand years.

But the most wonderful thing I found was the realization that all these phenomena, which reflect the power of nature, the activity of its creatures, the strivings of its human beings, agriculture and plants, animals and peoples, scenery and history, would not have been what they were and are were it not for the river.

Since it had arisen before me as a living being, driven from its radiant beginnings to its end in service, I could not but strive to show the inward necessity of these adventures, arising from its character, as in the lives of great men; to show how the river, like the boy, emerging from the virgin forests of childhood, growing in battle, fainting, falling, rises again to victory; how its distant, gallant brother hurries towards it, how they glide together through the desert, how at the height of its manhood it takes up the struggle

with man, how it is defeated, and, tamed, creates men's fortunes, and how, in the end, it accomplishes more tragedy than in all its early wildness.

And since childhood and youth, as with every living being, are chiefly determined by nature and environment, so here the elements must work more vitally at the beginning, while later life brings temptation and labour in the struggle with man. Out of the confused simplicity of the wilderness, the Nile streams into the complicated clarity of modern civilizations, sees the great plan of its tamers jeopardized, and, in the end, wearied of men's lust of gold, sinks into the sea, to be renewed in eternal resurrection.

The documents for the life of any river consist mainly of scientific works, or books of travel in which the writer travels with the reader. The new form of description here attempted demanded different groupings. In this, as in my former "Lives," I had, for the sake of the *linea aurea*, to check the river at the five vital points of its career—twice on Lake Albert, on Lake No, in Khartoum, in Assouan, and in Cairo. As my object was not to write a book of travel, but to tell the story of a great life, we, the reader and I, do not travel on the river. It is the river that travels: it is the river's adventures that enthrall us.

It would, however, be vain to seek here either a complete geography or history of the four Nile countries, or an encyclopaedia of their peoples, animals, or plants. They appear in fragments, which had repeatedly to be cut down, so that the river might flow on unhindered. Thus the long story of the discoverers of the Nile with which this volume opened had to be sacrificed: it may appear later.

The vertical line along the river from source to mouth had to be cut by historical horizontals, occupying a quarter of the first part and rather more of the second. For when

I saw the elephants and lions on the upper course of the Nile, the camels and asses lower down, which come every evening to drink its waters, there rose again before my eyes the shadows of all those figures who had lived, ruled, or suffered here, an endless train. I saw the religious and racial wars in the deserts and steppes of the Soudan and in Egypt, the birthplace of occidental man.

In this book, as in my former "Lives," I have sought to efface the evidences of the literature by means of which I deepened or completed my impressions. To show what I saw in its symbolic significance, to show the symbol in the visible event, seems to me more important than to parade with a host of names and dates that anybody can look up in works of reference. Here, as elsewhere, I sought to paint in colours what the expert presents in figures and tables. I had no wish to describe what is familiar in names, but to paint what lay before my eyes, then name it. Only once, at the crisis of the third act, where the problem of the dam brings the decisive moment of this life, a few figures had to remain, to which I beg the reader to submit. Whatever else was absolutely necessary has been given in round figures, for $602\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Lake No to Khartoum sounds less than 600. The transliteration of African names into European languages, too, is quite unsettled.

What will be specially missed here are big game expeditions, in which I do not take part, and ethnological discussions. My distrust of ethnological theory was confirmed when I saw all the races of the Nile shifted about by zealous scholars and attributed, and again withdrawn, from opposite racial groups. The whole learned dispute as to the Hamites and Semites, in the course of which fashion discovers new "circles of civilization" every five years, means less to me than the sight of a Bedouin on the Atbara, in whose splendid limbs

I could admire and honour a mixture of five or six races. Yet even if exact knowledge of such mixtures were forthcoming, it would be fruitless in a book in which the river holds sway. On the other hand, the social condition of the coloured peoples seemed to me important in an epoch which is preparing for them a new role in the life of mankind. All these things are perpetually influenced by the Nile, and, in their turn, react upon it. My only aim was to make its destiny clear, as a great parable.

* * *

On three other Nile journeys, between 1930 and 1934, I had studied the whole of the White Nile in Uganda, the Soudan and Egypt, and the Blue Nile on a safari to Western Abyssinia which led me into the region of its sources, and, in the Soudan, along its lower course. The longest, central reach of the Blue Nile, from Lake Tana to the Soudanese frontier, even to-day almost unexplored, had to be sketched in by the notes of a few travellers who have seen it in part. That I could do all the rest at my ease by rail and air, steamer and sailing boat, camel and mule, is due to the assistance and interest of the three governments on the Nile: the Egyptian, especially King Fuad I, who placed a steamer at our disposal; the English, which facilitated our travelling in every way; and the Abyssinian, which gave us a bodyguard of soldiers from Gallabad on.

The first part of this book was finished before the outbreak of hostilities in East Africa. I am deeply obliged to the following experts for advice in the reading of the manuscript: Major Barker, Director of the Zoological Garden, Khartoum, for the fauna; Marchese Gentile-Farinola, Varramista (Tuscany), for Abyssinia; Dr. h.c. Max Meyerhof, Cairo, for Arab

and other questions; Sir Harold MacMichael, Governor of Tanganyika, former Secretary of State in the Soudan, for the Soudan; Professor Yahuda, London, for Pharaonic history. Without always seeing eye to eye with me in detail, these distinguished experts have preserved me from a host of errors.

L.

MOSCIA

Summer 1935

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BOOK ONE

FREEDOM AND ADVENTURE

I

A ROAR heralds the river. Thundering, a shining sheet of water, radiantly blue, tense with life, plunges round the reef of a rocky islet in a double fall, while below, the spray thickens in a milky green vortex, madly whirling its own foam away to an unknown destiny. In such clamour, the Nile is born.

In a quiet inlet at the edge of the mighty fall, a gigantic maw yawns pink. Puffing and sluggish, the hippopotamus snorts and grunts as it raises its head above the water to squirt a water-jet from its nostrils between its pink-lined ears. Lower down, where the water grows calmer, bronze-green dragons, with black spots on their carapace and a yellowish belly, lie basking; to complete the illusion of fairyland, their eyes are rimmed with gold. Each bears a bird on its back, or even between its teeth, for the dragon sleeps open-mouthed. This is Leviathan from the Book of Job, the crocodile. It looks like some strange survival from the time when ferns and forests covered the earth and saurians ruled the world.

But above the primeval monsters, the world of feathered things soars, wheels, and swoops. All the birds crossing Northern Africa, and many from Europe, gather here, and their screaming drowns the din of the waters. On the bushy island in the fall, untrodden by the foot of man, at the source of the Nile, lies the paradise of the birds.

Soft white patches shimmering like orange-blossom from out the dark verdure are transformed, when a noise alarms them, into white egrets which fly away over the falls, trailing their black legs. The bird with the curious spoon at the end of his bill, from which he takes his name, the whitest thing in nature, looks small beside the huge grey one, who bears

his heavier body with hunched shoulders and indrawn neck slowly through the air. Suddenly there is a splash in the hurrying water: a big, dull black bird has dropped from the wet brushwood of the islet: it is that notorious glutton, the cormorant: he stays submerged for minutes at a time, rises far off, and, with the struggling fish in his beak, disappears with the powerful wing-strokes of a sea-bird. Disapproving, a grave black and white bird looks on: he walks with drooping head, then, as if to display real dignity, slowly spreads the shapely bow of his yellow-striped wings in graceful flight. This is the ibis, the holy bird of the Nile.

Proud and solitary, like the princes of Arabian legends, mute and unapproachable, the cranes stand along the banks. One, silver grey, with a noble gaze, who bears his rather too heavy head gracefully on his delicate neck, and holds his dark tail-feathers like a bouquet, at a single stroke spreads out a pair of gigantic wings and trails slowly away over the water, but his handsomer brother, whose feathers shimmer blue on tail and belly, carries on his head, like a peacock, a tuft of golden feathers; this is the crested crane, stately, gorgeous, and decadent like Van Dyck's royal portraits. Beside this prince, but slightly to the rear, as is seemly, stands the aged man of money. Ugly and comical, as in the fairy-tales, a picture of feigned repose and false dignity, unscrupulous and wary, shrewd and greedy, the black and white marabout is always to the fore if business is on foot, and takes everything that offers from the rat to the spider.

And among them the countless multitude of smaller birds flits to and fro over the source of the Nile, screaming, chattering, and piping: sun-birds flashing in water and light, turquoise blue with orange feathers, pink and rusty red, iridescent, among blue-shimmering kingfishers, with gleaming

thrushes darting over their heads. Bulbul, the oriental nightingale, invisible in the undergrowth, gurgles her melody, but close by her secret spot, the swallows from the north swoop past in softly twittering flight, seeking, like the German poets, the south and the oriental nightingale. And the rose-grey turtles coo in deep contralto, little opalescent blue-green starlings pipe their song into the screaming of the bigger birds, martins dip their brown breasts in the spray, and the wagtail, a Nile-bird like the ibis, the daintiest of all, warbles as it rocks. In a chorus of sound and colour, they whirl round the inaccessible islet in the falls, as though they feared man more than the hippopotamus, more than the crocodile and the great birds.

Where are we?

The source of the Nile, the Ripon Falls, lying close above the equator, three hundred yards broad, called by the natives "The Stones," plunges between virgin rocks bare of any green growth save brushwood and wild flowers, on a treeless plateau, for the white men have felled the forest on account of the deadly flies. It is the most northerly point of Lake Victoria, near Jinja, where the mighty roar proclaims a mighty spectacle. Behind grey rocks, which form a kind of natural dam, on the other side of the bay, lies the lake with its many islands, great and small, the lake which sends forth the river, the great messenger from the heart of Africa, to bear wonderful tidings to a distant sea.

None guessed its origin. For thousands of years men sought this source and went astray. The strange river, they thought, must draw its strength from high mountains, and, like every other river on earth, be formed of little mountain torrents. One day, late in time, only seventy years ago, it was discovered that the Nile began its course with a gigantic waterfall: the child of the greatest of all African lakes, it

showed its strength in the foam and thunder of the first day of its life.

Not all the breakers of these first hours will reach the goal. Wind and sun, rocks, animals, and plants will stop many, or dissolve them in air: nor will all the water that ends its course in the Mediterranean many months later come from this source, for the Nile has three sources, and, at the beginning, many tributaries. Yet there are many millions of atoms of water that follow the whole career of their river in its bed, from this fall which gives it birth, till at last they mingle with the salt of the sea.

Here, at the source, the veils of morning are rising from the lake, whose bounds no man can divine.

The growing light discloses hosts of islands, large and small, deep gorges cutting into the land, sandbanks far out, and beyond, ranges of hills fading into the pale blue distance. Broad, shimmering grasslands clothe the swelling banks, studded by single huge trees dividing light from shade in great masses, fertile, idyllic.

Even if all the islands and bays were not there to crowd the view, the eye could never reach the farther shore, for this lake is a sea, much bigger than Switzerland, with laws, forms, and dangers of its own, an unrelated element in this enchanted continent, a gigantic mirror for the sun of Africa, the frontier of a bucolic land which is called Uganda. It has been likened to Paradise, for here eternal summer reigns, without mortal heat by day, without sultry mist by night; rising from a level of three thousand feet, cooled by afternoon thunderstorms, by evening wind, almost without seasons, with an equal daily share of sun and rain, it is ever fertile, ever bountiful.

Behind the girdle round the lake, the last giants of a primeval world lie hid. For the land mounts terracewise from

the shores of this silken blue sea, rising in the north-west to hoary granite peaks and volcanoes, to the sources of rivers all flowing to the one great stream, and yet higher to the snow-capped summits of the Mountains of the Moon. Like a loosely fitting armour, these heights enclose the domain of the blessed race of men who, in the lakeside uplands, reap much longer than they sow.

For the shores of the lake are a park, formed by nature and the sun-browned hand of man. Pastel-green, the liquid light flowing through their delicate branches, so that their shadow falls but grey on the grass, lofty acacias stand singly, their crowns spreading like open parachutes. Close above the ground, the thick main trunk branches out all round, dry, gnarled, and tender grey: much higher up, the finely-articulated leaves begin to radiate, and the fruit droops in great mauve bunches. Above widespread roots, which rise above the ground, stands the dome of the ficus, as rich in timber and in shade as the royal sycamore beside it. The flaming red blossoms of slender flamboyants bow towards the lake, but the bright scarlet candelabra of the coral tree thrusts its rigid fingers into the air. Thus they stand, each single on these meadow slopes, almost motionless, the symbols of the landscape of a dream.

II

No human being has yet dared to lay hand on this part of Africa to shape or subdue it, although many a plan has been woven round the source of the Nile. Yet the river has been bridged in the first moments of its life: a short distance downstream a grey iron bridge bears the train which connects the mighty lake with the Indian Ocean, the small sea

with the great. Not until two thousand miles lower down, on the brink of the desert, will the Nile, completely transformed, know another bridge. Along this whole stretch through lands and peoples, save for one natural bridge, no one can cross the Nile unless by rowing; men and beasts have tried and lie buried in it: for long reaches the unbridged stream has proved a barrier between one fauna and another.

The young river takes no heed of the bridge: in a long series of falls and rapids, spraying and leaping, it drives its infant powers onward, foaming in the joy of life. A second fall, the Owen Falls, as broad as the first, but twice as deep, and still wilder, comes to lengthen the chain of rapids, and, calculating by the course of nature and not the other way round, these should be called the first and second Nile cataracts. Without pausing for breath, the young unnavigable stream foams and winds on northwards, but now it is no longer bordered by meadows and smooth plains. Since this region is uninhabitable owing to sleeping sickness, the river is here alone with the forest, as both were formed by the hand of their Creator, by vegetation and the erosion of centuries.

Living walls of trailing lianas here cut off the forest on both sides of the river, hiding from it the struggles and disasters of the great animals within, as we try to hide them from children, and leaving the river to its play all day. What goes on behind these living walls belongs to a time when the earth was younger and life denser and more exuberant. In this luxuriance of careless growth, where the individual struggle for existence stands out less hard and bare than in the more sparsely provided regions of the north, life and death grow indissolubly united: plants and animals, which no human hand has touched, are, in their inmost being, mutually dependent, even though the animals fight. Under a dome of

liquid green gloom, which creates the jungle atmosphere, the roots of huge trees cling to their prostrate forefathers, while their crowns, like great and lonely characters, tower over the dense *mêlée*, to form above with others a community of sunny heights. What grew on them falls away, turns to fresh fertility in this zone of unquenchable life, for no one reaps the fruit of these trees. Steaming in the brooding warmth of love, nature lies free of all purpose.

Through the ages the floor of the tropical forest has steadily risen; a moist, spongy humus of vegetable matter begets roots and stems from the twigs of falling, still living giant trees. Out of dying plants returning to earth, and even out of the body of living and growing ones, new plants rise and bloom from sucking roots, in the fearless joy of growth, for frost and hail, the enemies of the northern forest, and rough winds from the neighbouring snow-mountains cannot penetrate these self-created walls, while warmth and water, the two great patrons of the vegetable world, reign in profusion. The only enemy who can force his way in, who is nearly the strongest of all, the creature from an earlier world who held his own while all the others dwindled, the elephant alone is powerful enough to trample or break down with his mighty limbs whatever stands in his way. Without his huge tread, man would never have set foot in the jungle, for it is he who opened paths for the negro, and it was these paths the white man followed much later with his roads.

And as the jungle grows together from above and below, as the ferns and giant grasses press upwards to meet the hanging lianas, a living wall arises, impenetrable, and multiplied a hundredfold in the course of time, for the virile ring of the tree-felling iron has never startled this humming world.

The density of the forest begets its silence: only the remoteness of the bird-calls can give an idea of its depth, and only

of part of its depth. The grumbling of the monkeys, the whirring of insects, the sighing, creaking, and groaning of the giant tree-trunks, cramped for space and air, the croaking of frogs from the papyrus, the call of the oriole, the clatter of huge lizards, the silky gliding of the snakes, and again the whistling and rattling of the butcher-birds—sounds as muffled as the light in this forest, random and overloud, like children's voices raised in church, for in spite of all its wildness, the dimness and height of the jungle recall a cathedral.

Below, in the enormous trunks of the ficus, among drooping mauve orchids, deep niches have opened, as if in the columns of a cathedral, big enough to hold a man, while above, amid the blossoms on the branches, old baboons sit, still as black statues, bored with the capers of the colobus monkey, whose white tail and back stripes flash as he swings from one liana stem to the next. With its plant life hanging or standing weary and motionless, the sultry gloom of the jungle is only quickened by the animals in an eerie, secret way, so that the colours of the flowers sound louder than the footfalls and cries of the animals. Out of the mesh of creepers on the ground, part of a resting snake peeps out, the scream of a bird only has a meaning when the shadow of the white hawk flits by, and when parrots screech on the baobab, the elephantine tree with the wrinkled leather feet, even their noise is quickly overpowered by the mighty jungle silence.

But the burning cry of the coral-tree, where its fig-like branches catch the sun, falls from tips like a kind of giant bean: from out the feathery leaves of the acacias shine pink blossoms, big as a man's hand, bright blue convolvulus hang in long festoons from the boughs of the sycamore to the flamboyant with its densely crowded, flaming red blossoms.

In the clearings, on half-cleared pools, where the tropical

sun breaks through and the profusion of flowers is multiplied tenfold, their colours seem less audible. Here the animal is lord, for all living things gather at the water. From out the carmine convolvulus which muffles up the mimosa the turquoise-blue kingfisher, hanging close above the water, peers motionless, spying down to snatch the fish. Rocking to and fro on the flexible points of the palm-fans are the nests of the weaver-birds, who at these airiest points can elude the grasp of the monkeys and snakes. Down where the great ferns hang half-rotting over the water, sky-blue swallow-tail butterflies with purple eyes flutter by, others white with bright green edges to their wings, and blue lizards with orange spots lie basking between swamp and water.

With grotesque movements, the hornbill utters his hoarse screech, as though every sound were born of inmost pain, but in the next tree a starling sits piping away to herself as if alone in an idyll, the born master beside the panting amateur. Yet both are outsung by the flute-bird, who sends his seductive, contemptuous oboe call from out the thicket, as though he lived on air and water, were flinging a challenge to the wildness of the jungle, and were mocking, in bold, melting trills, all the eager life and gravity about him, till a magpie screams down his song.

And far from this teeming and careless throng, or at any rate heedless of it, the great animals of the jungle live and hunt, mate and fight. It is they who emerge in the evening at the rapids of the young Nile, to lap its fresh water. The negro who bathed and fished in some quiet cove all day has vanished, making way in the evening for the silent lords of the forest, for he fears them.

III

Not for forty miles below its source does the young Nile calm down. It has grown familiar with its first surroundings, it has fallen six hundred feet through the long rapids and waterfalls. It has already embraced a few woody islands too, and seen on them naked human creatures who have built little huts to catch, fry, and smoke fish.

Yet at the point where it emerges from the rapids and enters on a broad, quiet reach, men surprise the stream with a new terror: boats are waiting there, and little steamers, and the young creature must for the first time submit to a rider. At first, it shakes him wildly, for there are still many stones and rocks in the river bed, but then it yields, for men were cunning and built flat-bottomed boats. For a hundred and twenty miles, the Nile is now navigable. Where navigation to the north begins, at 1° N. lat., the railway line to the south-east starts, leading to Kenya and the sea: it hardly touches the Nile. Only at 13° N. lat., twelve hundred miles from here, will a second railway approach the river on that second bridge, which is as far from the first as the railway, so long is the stretch of lands, still longer the course of the river, through regions which defy the railway builder.

Scarcely has it taken the steamer on its back, when a new adventure awaits the Nile: the banks which bound its course retreat, it feels widened at every step. The forest which so firmly clasped it has gone. It is already six hundred yards broad, soon it will be many thousands: its waters are escaping its grasp, its form has vanished, it has poured into a sponge, seems to be losing itself there. As it broadens, it grows shallow; now it is nine feet deep, and still less at the edge of the swamp. At the same time its body is covered with

flowering weed. The whole world round about seems to stand still, to sleep, the river's youthful valour is paralysed, its gaiety is gone. What has happened?

This is Lake Kioga, a broad, muddy sheet of water with four great arms, a swampy lake fringed with papyrus. And as the Nile flows through this lake for some sixty miles, it has to carry its vegetation too. For miles the river flowing through the lake is covered with a kind of water-lily, thrillingly beautiful, pale blue, with a golden heart out of which sometimes a second flower grows. They lie like carpets, hardly moving, an even pattern spread out over the lake which seems to have swallowed up the stream.

The first tributaries take good care not to flow into the great sponge: it would devour them. Not until the point at which the Nile leaves Lake Kioga, at its western extremity, does the Kafu discharge into it, like a younger brother ending his short life by bestowing his portion on the elder. When the Nile, once more a river, turns north, it has taken on the nature of the lake: it is a shallow, swampy, sluggish stream. A dreamy, indolent mood must overcome it.

At this point in the course of the Nile variations set in that might be compared to the cyclical variations in certain characters: in irregular rhythm, for hundreds of miles and for many months of its course, its character changes: it is by turns stormy and repelling, wild and weary. It is impossible to say whether the river takes on the nature of its surroundings, or the surroundings that of the river. For the present it drags along northwards, falling very slightly, in the rhythm of Lake Kioga.

Then suddenly it takes a sharp turn, quitting for the first time its northerly course, sweeps west, and is completely transformed. The rocky bottom it at last feels again gives it fresh spirit, it hurls the boat from its back: once more, as

in earliest childhood, it is a mountain stream on which no man can travel, it grows narrower and deeper than it has ever been. Is this a new adventure?

The great African rift suddenly breaks through here in a curved escarpment. The region grows rocky, granite masses crowd together, a canyon narrows down. The Nile, whose first falls were no more than enlarged rapids, is suddenly faced with a great one: squeezed into a width of eighteen feet, it has to fall more than a hundred and twenty. The broad emergence from that inland sea is here compressed into a few foaming seconds: thundering, the excited river turns to spray as it falls.

These Murchison Falls, the first and last to plunge the Nile into such depths, first form its character. Here it knows terror, it dashes from one ledge of Africa to the next; this youthful experience, stormy as a passion, completely changes it. Here neither hippopotamus nor crocodile gambols, even the birds are rarer, for no fish will try the upward leap here. Instead of them, an everlasting rainbow, the immortal bridge between sun and water, hovers over the rocks. On the rocks, above and below, the light breaks into a thousand sparkling crystals, forming a glorious background to the mighty spectacle.

An hour below the falls, the foam on the hurrying water is still there to tell of the shock the Nile has suffered. Then it passes through bushlands into a rapidly broadening valley. And here for the first time the marvel of the antediluvian world comes into sight. Below the falls, the elephant, in the evening, comes to the river.

A giant, he still treads an earth whose creatures walk below him. The strongest of all, whom no animal and no tree can withstand, not even the thorn and the snake can harm him: like great men, he leaves his ponderous might unused, supreme in the consciousness of a strength which

none need fear: neither vainglorious nor predatory, he is the most generous and shrewdest of animals. Gifted with an even temper and a sense of humour, yet terrible in revenge, or in the protection of his young against the attacks of crafty men, possessed of the smallest of eyes in the biggest of faces, the sharpest hearing draped with a huge flap, an organ half nose and half arm, and tusks that can tear anything, he yet seems to carry off only what is strictly necessary, seldom alarms and hunts animals, eats none, feeds, like a monster in a fairy tale, on delicate grasses, barks and juices, and when he strides the ground with giant legs, he seems to be taking his colossal body for a gentle walk. Nothing about this monster is wild or coarse: his gait, his grasp, even his look, is serene.

In earlier times, they were known to all the earth: nowhere have so many tusks been found as about the Behring Strait. They lived in Rome and Ireland, in Siberia and Northern Spain: the remains showing the African elephant everywhere are of themselves enough to prove a connection by land between the two continents. But even in historic times the elephant was a European: a Phoenician traveller describes him in the neighbourhood of Gibraltar, and Hannibal's elephants on coins show the huge ears and sloping back which the Indian elephant does not possess.

When a herd comes out of the forest, hardly a twig cracks, so warily they move, and only the egrets ceaselessly wheeling above them betray where they are, for they live on the insects of the elephant's skin like the philologists on the poets. They distrust man: he has too often tricked them from ambush: now they stand still, sniffing, for minutes at a time, with no sound but the flapping of gigantic ears. As they have a calf in their midst, they are on the *qui vive*, for they beat a soft retreat if they are unnoticed, but break out if they feel them-

selves watched; men, less noble, do the opposite. Now they emerge from the bushes, only two-thirds visible, for the high grass hides them to the knee. The calf moves under the mother between her forelegs, where the udders are, but first he throws back his trunk to take suck with his mouth. The others have already reached the water: they have sought out a little cove: they have trampled down everything, not in rage, but simply because they are big: they stand snorting in the Nile, squirting water over their sloping backs with their supple trunks, drinking now and then, and removing a whole meadowfull of high grass, and as they can never be seen really chewing, as they never open a vast mouth like the hippo, it all seems to have vanished into the unfathomable.

As they return from the river, they look dead black against the yellow savannah, but their tusks, which the females have here too, shine the whiter. The bull leads the troop. The white heron resettles on his back, like the white genie in the fairy tale which guides aged and great sinners, and the giant, refreshed, strolls towards the forest with his rolling gait, wet and happy, casually examining an acacia with his trunk to see if it is worth while stripping the bark with his tusks, casting a half-glance backwards to make sure that his wife and child are coming. Thus he withdraws from the Nile into the dark green of the jungle, of which he is lord, with his human intelligence, which foresees, plans and remembers, stronger than any other living creature, serene and supreme, the last real king of nature.

Here, where the river steadily widens, is the first real home of the hippopotamus and the crocodile, which have been counted in their thousands below the Murchison Falls: here it is sunny and flat, and these water-creatures seem to feel protected from all dangers in the neighbourhood of a gigantic bathing-pool.

For now the Nile, for the first time, sees a great lake with open water ahead, boundless like Lake Victoria, which it never saw, for that lay behind it. Beyond the yellow savannah which spreads out like a delta, lies the northern end of Lake Albert. The Nile, three hundred miles from its source, ceases here to bear the name of Victoria Nile, and, powerfully reinforced from a second source, becomes the Albert Nile as soon as a short reach of the river has crossed the corner of the lake. On flat islands and landspits, which lie before the shores as in the lagoons, the crocodiles bask in thousands, silvery fish leap in the sap-green water of the coves, while the clear stream otherwise flows blue and seems to suffer no swamp. On the banks, where grassland alternates with forest and great clumps of trees approach the water, a herd of dainty antelopes moves: the reedbucks come slowly to the water, to the Nile, which gives all creatures to drink.

In this clear lake the river cannot go astray, as in the Kioga swamps: a powerful current draws it, the way lies clear ahead. In the western distance rise the purple shadows of high mountains; there another great river flows, the Congo; it moves westward and the Nile will never know it. Its own course leads northwards. Before following it, let us seek what feeds its second source, the mighty water-basin of Lake Albert.

IV

In the wilful windings of rivers, their former existence stands revealed, uncertain as regards the passage of time and the details of their course, yet, as with men, discernible through the mists of memory, and neither to be proved nor ignored. In the land of Uganda, that prehistory is even more legible than history itself: the prehistoric world takes precedence of

the historic. For what happened here to Adamatic man has sunk back into the womb of time, because till yesterday he remained without writing and almost without tradition, but prehistory has carved its runes and signs on the mountains. The course of the primeval Nile can be conjectured.

Africa, a continent of shelves, the only one that can be called so, the continent without mountain ranges, has, on the ledge of the great lakes, made or suffered an exception. It happened when the crust of the continent was torn in two, when the huge rift was formed which runs diagonally through East Africa from Rhodesia to the valley of the Jordan, taking in the Red Sea. From the belly of the earth, raging fire burst forth, heaved giant clods into mountains, folded them back and laid the lower-lying land at the base of the new volcanoes open for the rivers and lakes to gather and flow away. To the south of the Nile basin, the rift branched, the eastern arm running to Kenya and forming Kilimandjaro, the western forming the three lakes to the west of Victoria Nyanza, which itself represents a subsidence of the plateau between the two.

However uncertain the intervals of time remain, it seems clear that the seven lakes of Central Africa are of recent date, that where Lake Victoria now lies, broad plains once lay, traversed by the feeders of the present lake. Later on, great water-basins may have formed which, rising with perpetual rain, spread and broke through the flanking rim of hills. The water deepened, widened the gap, and forged its way to the plain: rapids and falls stand witness to this course of development.

Above the great volcanoes and small craters, which can be seen and heard to this day in the congealed lava, the earth tremors and hot springs, there rose in primitive rock a royal witness, the Ruwenzori, a range of snow-mountains higher than Mont Blanc. This is in truth the heart of Africa. The

waters flow to east and west to feed the greatest rivers of the continent, the Nile and the Congo.

It is not the Ruwenzori itself that forms the watershed, it is a chain of volcanoes rising to a height of 13,500 feet, and running from about 2° S. lat. to the equator: of these a certain group, the Mufumbiro range, now seems to form the exact watershed. In the course of that metempsychosis of the rivers, it has changed, and even to-day remains mysteriously uncertain: lines waver, the geographers and hydrographers perpetually renew their measurements. The names show where it is: the four lakes with the English royal names which have been so surprisingly transported to Africa, belong to the Nile: those with the African names, Lakes Kivu and Tanganyika, to the Congo. Within these limits lie the sources of the two great rivers which quicken the ancient, strangely rigid continent.

But if the Nile takes all its water from the lakes, that does not explain what feeds the lakes. And if the lakes are fed less by rivers than by rain, that still does not explain where the rain comes from. These questions are still unsettled. At present the rain of the Nile basin is believed to come mainly from the South Atlantic. Evaporation and condensation caused by the tension between sea and land remains even on the whole, but not in the detail. Thus over this basin there goes on the tug-of-war of evaporation, the formation of rivers and their departure for the sea. In this cycle, which holds a third of the rainfall of the earth captive, the depth of the basin plays an important part. As Lake Victoria is not three hundred feet deep, so that more water evaporates than is received, this constant diminution, as we shall see later, presents the Nile engineers with a very grave problem. In accordance with its configuration, the lake, as the source of the Nile, has a climate, and even a wind-system of its

own. The alternation of land and sea winds, the frequency of thunderstorms, the high temperature of the water, which reaches nearly 79° , the absence of dry months, and the evaporation from the gigantic surface are the basic factors of its climate.

Not its feeders. It certainly receives them from three sides, while it yields its waters only at that one northern point by Jinja: it also receives large quantities of steeply-falling water from short rivers which flow from the isolated volcano, Mount Elgon, which rises to over 12,000 feet in the north-east. Only one of the fifteen feeders, however, is important, and it was this which was formerly called the Nile, since, by the logic of geographers, the greatest feeder of a lake must needs reappear in its greatest outflow, and this not merely in small lakes, where the current can be measured or seen, but even where the greatest distances intervene. If it is to be assumed that this western feeder is the original Nile, it takes two hundred miles by the shortest route through the lake to reach its outflow in the north. The only thing to support this idea, for it is an idea, is the name given to it by the natives, that is, "The mother of the Jinja river."

This feeder of Lake Victoria, the Kagera, is a mighty river, even without bearing the name of Nile. It is 450 miles long, drains the greater part of the western lake plateau, and at its three rather inaccessible mouths in Lake Victoria can only be navigated by rowing boats, for these mouths vary according to the height of the plants which it carries down from the mountains. After a navigable stretch, which often broadens into pools, its higher reaches lie in deeper clefts, often thickly covered and swampy with papyrus, and, as we approach its sources, it is once more a wild mountain torrent.

There are three of these sources which, like the seven

cities of Homer, dispute the honour of being the home of the Nile; all have fantastic names, but the one with the dark-coloured name Ruvuvu, after countless surveys, to-day holds the field as the source of the Kagera. Six thousand feet up, on Belgian territory, on the eastern fall of the rift between Tanganyika and Lake Edward, in the dense mountain jungle, lies the source of the Ruvuvu, and whoever likes may see in this most southerly tributary the top-head of the Nile.

V

In a wide embrace, the Ruwenzori Range encloses the beautiful land lying round the western lakes. The ancients called it the Mountains of the Moon, for, as they could not explain the snow on its summit, the negroes said that the mountains had drawn the moonlight down to them. And in its lofty isolation above the equator, it might well be made of some unearthly substance where plants and granite have come to an end and the eternal ice of its 15,000 feet high domes and peaks shines against the golden yellow sky of evening. Lonely, a philosopher, sufficient unto itself in the feeling of its height, this range long withstood the curiosity of man; for months it veiled its head before three great explorers, so that they began to doubt the negroes' assurances, and many travellers who to-day can seek it by the map at a particular spot never see it. It is richer than all the mountains of Africa for, as the rains break against its rocks, it discharges a thousand rills which grow into rivers, collect in lakes, and all, at last, form the other half of the Nile. The Mountains of the Moon might be called the king of this country, but they are its father.

This mountain range, along its sixty miles of length,

ascends in three impressive tiers: the first, that of the bush, at an altitude of about three thousand feet, is the broadest.

The bush is light: an open, undulating country, traversed by wide grasslands, bears the acacia in many forms: one, leafless, thorny, greenish-white, another, white, with pale green leaves between the thorns, yet another, black and leafy, with dark boughs, a fourth with shimmering red bark, and yet another, the highest, with gigantic lavender-blue bunches of grapes hanging from it like flowers. Among them, darker and more massive, the euphorbia, rising like a protest to heaven, is hardy enough to live far up the heights. Everything about it, as about the elephant, looks primeval, shaggy, and strong, every tree might be a family with its head, the huge yellow and red flower at the top. On the parched yellow veldt, tall mauve orchises and carmine amaryllis stand like lilies: close to the ground, thick-stemmed flowers like red powder puffs grow in thousands. A marshy glint of dark green, with the birds wheeling above it, shows where the rivers are hurrying through the papyrus and denser parts of the forest. The strong giant grass, twelve feet high and as thick as the bamboo, tapering upwards with broad upstanding leaves, is called, here and everywhere along the Nile, elephant grass; it is overtopped by the reddish tree-heath, tall and thorny.

To the high steppe streams of this lower region, the reed-buck crowds in troops, almost fearless. Greyish-red, hairy waterbucks raise their lovely horns, lay their nostrils upwind, sniffing the air, while the ungainly warthog, shambling along with hanging head, betrays less courage and hence less fear. Impala antelopes seem to float as they vault over the thorn-bushes: all are drawn by the green strip which promises water. Above the swarms of locusts sweeping by in long

ribbons, marabouts wheel in masses as if they were birds of prey; below them files of duck fly low over the papyrus swamp, startled by the sharp cry of a kite.

In the second, higher zone of the Ruwenzori, in the forest, among gorges and high valleys where the rainfall increases, and with it the moss that covers whole forests, the mountains are girdled with a belt which can be clearly distinguished from a distance. Here a beautiful conifer pierces the bamboos: still higher, the lobelia stares open-eyed, a giant flower-candle like a lance, with strange grape-like clusters hanging from it. Like monuments in deserted graveyards, these great plants stand in the forest of eternal rain.

Pink and blueish, the tree-heath blooms near them, its thick stems bearded with cloudy mosses which grow, too, from below, green, orange-gold, even crimson. Generations of its dead ancestors lie about in heaps, and the bamboo, half-broken, creaks on every side in the rain and the wind. In this landscape lie the crater lakes.

There are many of them, blinking dark-eyed from these forests, embedded between steep walls which show the soft formation characteristic of the crater. The dense quiet, the deep cooing of the doves, the bananas in cultivated spots in the forest, where a few huts hint at the presence of man, here and there a virgin mountain pasture—everything looks and feels like a park run wild, and only the game recalls, suddenly and terrifyingly, the dangers it harbours. Elephant and buffalo have been sighted up to 5,500 feet, the lion, pursuing the wild hog, up to 7,000, a few species of antelopes, baboons, and other apes, the great wild cats and the hyrax, a leaping hare, still higher, the leopard as far as the snow-line. Only one bird reaches the highest lobelia, a sun-bird, glossy green, seeking honey on the verge of the snow.

Along this third and narrowest zone, where an almost

perpetual veil of rain and cloud is transformed into snow, a chain of snow-peaks stretches out, as in the Caucasus, running for over thirty miles. At this height, the last tokens of the ice-age glitter through the ages like witnesses of a saga over the equator.

At the foot of these mountains where, to the west of Lake Victoria, in the basin of the Kagera, the land rises from 3,000 to 9,000 feet, it reaches the eastern edge of that great rift which here suddenly drops to 4,500 feet. The slope is so wild and intact that, save for the buffalo and the elephant, the game is suddenly faced by startling frontiers, and can go no further. This rift, broken and shaken by the not yet extinct volcanoes, has collected the waters in its depths to form the chain of lakes, and these lakes partly engender and partly receive the rivers. They dashed down as strong brooks, but in the rift they are dammed, turn to sluggish rivers of the plain, and seek desperately for an outlet.

Lake Edward, which receives water from south and north, discharges the whole northwards into the Nile. Nearly all the waters draining from the Ruwenzori are carried to the Nile through Lake George and Lake Albert. All the water draining or raining in Uganda, rivers, lakes, and mountain burns, struggle towards the two Nile sources. Even what would fain escape is not lost. The river Kafu, which first raced the young Nile, has not yet made up its mind. It has a choice of two directions: if it flows towards the swamps of Lake Kioga, it will fall into the arms of the Victoria Nile: if it goes west, the Albert Nile is waiting for it. In both cases, its little life will be swallowed up in the destiny of its great companion.



NEAR THE SOURCE, THE RIPON FALLS



[Lehner & Landrock, Cairo

CROCODILE NEAR THE SOURCE

VI

The two source-systems of the Nile have now met: everything flows together at the northern extremity of Lake Albert to strengthen the flow of the young stream whose length is yet unknown. The rivers have made many a twist and turn, for it is not so far, as the crow flies, from the source to this most northerly outflow of the stream in Uganda—a hundred and sixty miles, which can be quickly covered through hilly country on a good road. Between the two lakes, the Victoria Nile has flowed from south-east to north-west, and, strange to say, the three great tributaries which await it at wide intervals on the right all flow into the river in the same direction as it took itself from its first to its second source, like children following the first steps of a great father, without being able to keep up later with the many turns of his fate.

Lake Albert, which, though much smaller than Lake Victoria, is all the same eight times as big as Lake Constance, is the great receptacle for all the rivers, long and short, which stream down from the snow and rain of the Mountains of the Moon to feed the Nile. It actually fills the rift from 1° to 2° N. lat., and hence is framed by mountains along both its long sides. Owing to its length and extent, this lake even forms an animal frontier, and because here the locusts, or at least certain species of them, cease, the vivid speech of the negroes has named it "Luta-nziga," that is, "The brightness which kills the locusts."

"The spirit of the lake," said a negro king to a traveller, "can unchain frightful winds and capsize all your boats." To propitiate it, they gathered in the presence of the king and cast fowls and glass beads into the lake where the spirit had

its dwelling. As there is only one real harbour, and the boats—or rather the curious rafts of papyrus stalks—are small, everything is in danger because the winds rise suddenly with terrific thunderstorms. On the other hand, the spirit of the lake has bestowed on the shore-dwellers great quantities of fish which, driven shorewards by storms, are caught with long lines or even in baskets, and the legend of monstrous perch found here by their ancestors is a commonplace of local talk.

The most important thing here is the salt. Victoria Nyanza, the great lake which looks like a sea, tastes sweet: Albert Nyanza, the narrow lake, is salty, and from it most of the negroes of the region get their livelihood. The tall grasses which they use to wattle their huts, are not as close at hand as over in Uganda: they have to tramp far to buy them, and they pay for them in the salt with which half Uganda seasons its food, as well as millions of other men and races far into the Congo State, where it is lacking. The fact that this salt remains in the lake, and that the Nile, on leaving the lake, tastes almost sweet, is destined to have serious results thousands of miles away in far-off Egypt. Thus the consequences of early experiences suddenly re-emerge in age from the depths of fate. Among mountains so steep as to prevent for miles on end any cultivation of corn, salt, the unfruitful, becomes the spring of human life. But the men stir no finger to get it. The women do everything.

It is a veritable witches' cauldron. At the north-eastern end of the lake, from deep gullies, from boulders and debris, the warmth of which the white man can feel through the soles of his boots, hot springs gush forth, and sulphurous gases rise, steaming, airless, stifling. From these hollows spurts clear hot water, saturated with salt. The women, working naked amid such vapours, build little walls of mud and water; an eerie sight, as though a village had fallen in ruins; and

they dam up the hot, salty ooze in little channels. Between the little walls, each working place separate, women and children crouch, scraping the mud from the water with native iron scrapers and filling little earthenware troughs with it, partly to collect it and partly to let it drip. The art lies in the mixture of earth and water. If rain has cooled the ground, there is no salt, therefore they dread the rain for which their brothers long. For this mineral, which they draw from the water, is as precious to them as that other which other men wash from other waters: salt is their gold.

The grey, bitter-tasting stuff is then packed by the men in banana leaves and laid in long, narrow sheaths of bamboo stems like models of Nile boats, which they carry on their shoulders, and now, equipped with a sleeping mat and a gourd of water, they tramp naked for days on end to the market, where their brothers weigh up the salt and give them their treasures in exchange, papyrus, corn, beads, spears, a hide; everything they need for food, houses, clothing, hunting, and decoration, they get for the salt which their women and children have scraped from the earth of their home amid fetid vapours. This astonishing industry, carried on by people who have never heard of a mine, in a land in which, till a hundred years ago, no white man had set foot, goes back, according to tradition, to very ancient times.

Yet close by there is a people, far more astonishing, more ancient, whose physique and history are unique in the world. On the slopes of the Mountains of the Moon live the pigmies.

Here an African people can be traced from ancient times on the same spot, for Aristotle insists that he is telling no fable, that the dwarfs really live there in caves, and the only thing that has proved to be legend are the pigmy horses he attached to them. In the course of ages, they appear to have migrated to these heights from the South African veldt,

and when the negroes began to cultivate the land, to have been driven back, being the weaker, into the densest parts of the jungle: they still recruit themselves from the Congo forests, and continually sally forth, only to be driven back by the big Bantu negroes. Thus the pigmies, generally called the Bakwa in these parts, perpetually beset, tough, wary, and inextinguishable, outlive the dominating races, with whom they rarely mingle. Physique and fate have, here as everywhere, formed their character: in every way they recall the gnomes and brownies of Nordic tales, who themselves owe their existence to real dwarfs, whose bones have been found in deposits of the European stone age.

The pigmies are not handsome, but they are not really grotesque. Their body, brownish black or yellowish and very hairy, some 4 ft. 4 ins. in height, with a protruding abdomen and a navel like a button, bears a head which looks old, shrewd, and sad. Large quantities of hair, the long beards of the men, almond eyes, a big, thin-lipped mouth at once distinguish them from their neighbours; their silence and thoughtfulness, their lack of negro inquisitiveness and loquacity, a cleverer and shyer attitude, which recalls the big apes, set them apart. When they stand naked in the market, the women slightly clothed with garments of stretched bark, suspicious alike of negroes and whites, the women more impudent, but shyer and wilder, the traits of the gnome stand out clear: they are masters of shrewdness and deceit, cruel and helpful, sympathetic and vindictive, cunning and grateful. Only the elders show signs of suffering: they know it was all in vain.

They could hardly have become otherwise in the struggle with other tribes which looked away over their heads and despised them as the bigger man of nature despises the smaller, especially in the midst of this densely populated part of the

earth. All men about them lived on cattle or corn, hunting was a festival like war: they alone, in their smallness, a result of adaptation to their surroundings in the course of time, slipped into the jungle. Thus they lived through the ages as nomads, in tiny, swiftly woven huts in inaccessible haunts, which the Bantu negro especially shuns in his superstition as the home of the dwarfs. There the pigmies guard the fire they cannot light—their cousins to the west of Mount Elgon do not even know it—roast meat and bananas on it, and make beautiful pots and baskets. They eat only what they kill, but they eat more freely of everything than other tribes—boar and gazelle, rats and locusts, fish and snakes; that is why men and women file their upper incisors and eye teeth.

Their life is strangely simple in the huts which they rarely share with others, creeping into them through little mouseholes: at home the women are always naked, without ornaments, tattooing, or necklaces. Thus they live, not only without a faith, like most of their neighbours, but without headmen or chiefs, and only from time to time do they recognize the best huntsman as a privileged being: they reject everything which might lead to state and community: each lives his own life, with a few women of his own, a family man with a great love for the children whom the women have borne, not in the huts, but out in the forest, biting through the navel-string themselves, like animals.

As they have adopted from their neighbours neither vegetables nor the cultivation of crops, they meet them only for a tribal or hunting feast. Then the pigmies are merrier and more musical than all the natives of the region, sing choruses and solos, laugh and tell tales, but drink little and are in every way better behaved. Their only passion is smoking and snuff.

Just like the northern brownies, these goblins are thankful

thieves. When, at night, they venture out of their forest to steal bananas, the food they like best because they have none at home, they often leave under the pillaged tree a piece of meat from some animal they have killed, or think out some still more elfin way of payment: while their negro victim sleeps, they creep about on softly-falling feet and weed part of his plantation, or set up a trap to catch game for him, or drive the monkeys from the bananas. But sometimes these cunning half-gipsies, these shrewd half-apes, carry away a negro child into the forest, leaving a changeling for the screaming mother to find.

Their greatest greed is for elephants. The biggest animal falls victim to the smallest man just because he is small, as one of their discoverers has described. Armed with sharp lances, one of them slips under the animal, who is too short-sighted to hit the mark with his trunk, and is doomed to fall into crafty hands. There, round the quarry, they live long, till everything is eaten up, but with the ivory they buy what they need. Even the fish they ambush with impish cunning: damming up little water-courses, draining off the water by canals, and catching the struggling fish with their hands.

Thus the little hunters became great smiths and warriors. Despised by their bigger brethren, who mock the "men with the span-long beards," they force them all the same to take in barter the spears they have forged from pig-iron out in the forest, and spearheads too, and iron rings for the women. Then one ruling tribe uses them in war against the other, and when the dwarfs, with their sharp wits, have become advisers to a chief, their gratitude outgrows their malice, and, with the conservatism of all long-oppressed peoples, they cling to those who treat them well in order to exploit them.

But who are these Bantu tribes with whom the pigmies live in perpetual discord? Who are the lords of this land?

VII

The land of Uganda is richer and more blessed than all its neighbours because a gracious climate makes the fruits of the earth grow of themselves, and because a happy fate kept the white man away till eighty years ago. For hundreds of centuries, some millions of negroes lived here, ignorant of the seductions of the east and north, and when Speke appeared here, he was the first to tell them of a paradisal people which called itself happy. If a Buganda on Lake Victoria is questioned to-day, he has no answer save that he came from the land "where the moon draws fresh strength and its lovely white light from the summits of the snow mountains." Or he points in the direction of the source of the Nile and says that that is the country of which the great river is born. But if he is questioned about time, he counts one year as two, for he reaps twice, and says: "The first month of the year is the month of sowing: the other five are for eating." They had everything before they were discovered—bananas, corn, and vegetables, fish and sheep, and have only been decimated of late by long race wars.

This race is believed to be a mixture of Bantu, Nilotic, and Hamitic tribes, but as nothing was ever written down, nothing is certain, and only one thing is sure, that here as everywhere the mingling of peoples has meant their happiness, and racial ambition their downfall.

The dominating Bantu negroes, powerful, well-made men, round-headed, dark brown, with a satiny skin and strong frame, are the farmers: the pastoral peoples beside them,

separated from them by the age-old jealousy between nomads and farmers, the Bahima, who are much lighter and handsomer, with a straight nose and thin lips, often look like the children of a white man and a mulatto woman.

Formerly—no one can say when—the Bahima pushed into the land as conquerors, perhaps from Abyssinia, and settled first on Lake Kioga, then on Lake Victoria too. They certainly lost their supremacy to the more capable Bantus but because they are handsomer and more skilful, they look down on them. Although even the greatest anthropologists place many a question mark beside the conclusions they draw from the physique of the two races and from oral tradition, this early immigration offers the only explanation for the astonishing customs of these secluded negroes.

For indeed, by incredible detours, the great civilization of the mouth of the Nile, Egypt, seems to have had an influence, a hundredfold diluted, even on these distant negroes at the source of the river, just as a ray from some great mind illuminates that of men who never heard of its existence. As the Egyptians never penetrated up Nile to Uganda, how did the straight-backed cattle with the giant horns come here, to wander to this very day among the negroes on the equator just as they do on the ancient Egyptian frescoes? How came the same harps, the same trumpets of antelope-horn before the eyes and ears of these black chiefs as those with which a Pharaoh was wont to rouse the feeling of his might? Egyptian culture must have been powerful enough to impress itself upon those Hamitic-Arab tribes by way of Somaliland and Abyssinia, where its monuments survived: then, driven into the fertile land about the Nile sources in successive waves by war and famine, they brought it to black men who had never heard of, much less seen those strange white men.

The people found here by the first Europeans in 1860,

thousands of years later, cannot have taken its surprising culture from the three or four Arab traders who, about 1850, were the first to penetrate into the interior from Zanzibar to buy slaves from the great black kings. The first white man to discover them on the great lake was neither explorer nor missionary, but a soldier from Zanzibar who had fled from his creditors into the interior. The black king took a fancy to this man because he had a white skin, fine hair, and a fine beard: in 1857 he was still living with the king, surrounded by his three hundred wives. These millions of men in Central Africa heard from an insolvent soldier of the existence of white races for the first time since, a few thousand years before, they had received customs and utensils from the most highly civilized land on the Mediterranean without even knowing its name. This oddest of all agents of civilization was followed by a few Arab traders and sheiks.

And yet the king was by no means the most astonished man in Uganda. Anxious, flattered and hurt, those Bahima who had grown steadily blacker by intermarriage with the Bantus, now, at the appearance of those first Arabs, swore they were their blood-relations, that their own ancestors had been much whiter, and had had long hair too. Now they feared that those strange men had come, as once their own ancestors had come, to take the lovely land.

When, close on the heels of the Arabs, the first Englishmen, the real discoverers, arrived to find a people which, a decade before, had never seen a white man, what was the state of these savages?

From round, generally dome-shaped huts, skilfully wattled of high grass and banana fibre, stepping from a porch or gallery, there came to meet them men and women wrapped in skins or bark, whose first business in the morning was to stamp down afresh the mud wall which protected their

dwelling from the daily rain. Through marshy stretches, they had made dykes of palm-stems; paths hedged by salvias led from one village to another in this densely populated country. The people were forbidden by their king, on pain of death, to go naked to market: only in war or in their canoes did the men take off their skins; save for house-building, their only occupation was war.

All the work was left to the women: they sowed and reaped, ground the corn between two millstones, cowering and singing, steamed meat and fish, wrapped in banana leaves, over pots they had made of clay without a wheel. Out of the narrow leaves of the date-palm they made baskets for the red coffee-beans which they grew outside the village, but they knew, too, how to dry hides in the sun, stretch them on a frame, make them supple with oil and cut sandals of buffalo hide. So civilized were the manners of these negroes that they washed their hands before meals, and again after, before they drank their coffee.

They might have lived on the banana alone, that gift of God, of which they grew some thirty species. The fruit of some they steamed to pulp: others they fermented, and added extracts of herbs to make wine and a sweetish kind of beer, the fronds were used for thatching the house, for their beds, and to protect the milk in the pots: the stems for hedges, or as rollers to carry the canoes overland. The pith they scraped out served for sponges, and from the fibres they made string and sun-hats. Except for meat and iron, the tree gave them everything—a true tree of life.

When no war was on hand, the men made fish-hooks for their lines of aloe-fibre: they dug deep pits for the elephant, which they killed afterwards with the spear: the buffalo was caught in snares of thorn, the little antelopes with nets, and even lions and leopards in traps of heavy tree-trunks.

On the hunt, they set out by the hundred. They even invented a weapon which might be taken for a myth of Münchhausen if it had not been described by the greatest experts on Uganda. They caught young poison snakes in the jungle, nailed them to a tree above an animal spoor, so that the creature, wild with pain, struck a leopard or some other game passing by instead of the negro, who, hidden close by, could then easily kill his quarry. They wove baskets of bark, hung them at the top of high trees where they had seen bees, and the bees, glad to find a home, deposited their honey in them; the negroes hurried up, smoked them out and collected not only the honey for food, but the wax for a kind of candle.

A man might have as many wives as he pleased, for there were three times as many women as men—even to-day there is a superfluity of women—because in their battles they killed all adult males after the victory, but carried off the women with them, especially the beautiful Bahima women. Therefore, in Uganda, women were always cheaper than anywhere else: formerly they cost only three oxen, later six sewing needles or a pair of shoes.

Few children were born, and a man to whom a second child was born of the same woman had the right to beat the drum for two months outside his hut to invite his friends to drink with him. They showed in everything so highly developed a feeling for form and so much tact that Johnston wrote, "All the Bahima are born gentlemen." To the approaching stranger, they sent refreshments, and they let him rest in his hut before visiting him. In conversation they have chosen strange formulas of speech, saying to each other: "Thank you for enjoying yourself. Thank you for admiring my house. Thank you for thrashing my son."

And all that was felt and put into practise by a people untouched by a definite faith in God or moral doctrine,

and acting only by the profound moral standards graven deep in the heart of man. Such was the state of these so-called savages when they were found in 1860.

The guardian of it all was the king, who had jurisdiction over life and death, surrounded by his court which, like that of the Carolingians, included not only the minister, the cup-bearer, the harper, the flute-player, the watchman, the pipe-bearer, but also the executioner, the brewer, and the cook. One of these kings, who had more than seven hundred children, possessed, in addition to his lawful wives, many hundreds of concubines, some nineteen hundred of whom he sent to the market, thus levying a novel kind of tax by providing his subjects with sensual satisfaction. As the sole owner of land and cattle, he bestowed, like the medieval kings of the west, lands in fief on his "counts," kept them in good humour at the cost of the peasants and played them off against each other by their mutual jealousies: he, the apex of the pyramid of state, stood high above the base formed by the landless peasantry, just like the Czar in Old Russia. As the king taxed every cow, the count was responsible for each single one, and if a lion or a neighbour broke in, he had perforce to organize a hunt or a war to recapture or replace the cows.

The last of these kings to wield kingly power, Mutesa (1840-1884), whom the first travellers visited here, showed all the qualities of his white peers, only that he was much wiser than many of them. In his palace, a hall ninety feet long, surrounded by drummers, banner-bearers, and lancers, he received the first strangers with a dignity worthy of the Grand Monarch; he treated these men approaching his throne, who must have seemed like gods to him, with graciousness and without curiosity, gave them help instead of murdering or forcibly detaining them, and when he sat there, robed in

Indian silk, one leg stretched out before him, like the western kings on old prints, how could he know that grace and dignity make the real ruler? The great hall was of straw, but spacious as a marble hall in Rome. When he ate, many men and women of the court stood about him, only the minister standing at the door to avert every evil glance from the covered dishes, for he alone had the right to eat up what was left. But when the king spoke, the courtiers cried after every sentence: "Nyanzi-ge," which means roughly "Thanks! Excellent," not otherwise than at court banquets in Europe.

And who had divulged to Mutesa that a king must weave fantastic legend about his father? "My father," he said, "fell ill in old age: every day, to placate the evil spirits, he had a hundred young men killed. But when he recovered, and, as of old, came riding into the open air on his prime minister, he fell down dead. Then he was sewn into a cow-hide and left floating three days in the lake, till three worms came crawling out of him: then he was brought home and forthwith turned into a lion. My grandfather was so strong that he would have lived for ever if he had not, after endless time, spirited himself out of the world to make way for the son who had been waiting so long."

And what did the ancestors of his father do? "I am the eighteenth of our dynasty," said King Mutesa. "The founder of our house came from far away as a famous hunter. He was so strong and handsome that the queen fell in love with him, instantly poisoned her husband, and made him king and father of the next king."

Three fine sayings of Mutesa have been preserved. When about to drag his war-booty through an unfriendly land, he sent its black king a hundred arrows and a hundred hoes. "If you desire peace," he sent word to him, "take the hoes and dig your fields with them: if war, take the arrows, you

will need them." The other took the hoes, and since then has borne the name of King of the Hundred Hoes. When an Englishman appearing before him apologized that his presents had been swept away by floods, King Mutesa said: "The great rivers swallow up the small ones. Since I have seen your face there is no other thought in my mind." And when Stanley explained to him by anatomical charts how the wrist and finger muscles worked the king said: "Wonderful. I couldn't make anything like that. And yet I should not destroy anything that I cannot make." Shortly afterwards he showed his royal displeasure with a subject by having his ear cut off.

It is wonderful that the Buganda should pay divine honours to the Nile, which they see only in its wild infancy, and of whose deeds and destiny a thousand miles away they know, or at least knew, nothing. But even on the islands in the lake, spirits live, and to secure safe transit for an American traveller the king beheaded seven medicine men who were believed to be evil demons of the lake. At the great Nile festival, to celebrate the rites of the source, King Mutesa issued, preceded by the great band, with flutes of reeds, trumpets of antelope horn, and a harp made of wood, animal hide, and gut strings. If the melodies they played were diatonic, their ears heard the half-tones, hundreds danced along after the band, but the king came sailing in full ceremony over the lake, his boat loaded with wine and women, and ordered his rowers to keep their heads down so as not to see the women, so shrewd was King Mutesa, king or emperor of Uganda. His grave is built like that of a hero, fenced round with protecting spears, lances, and arrows.

In this way a gifted savage people has proved, in its constitution and customs, that the state of paradise can of itself develop forms not actually inferior to those elaborated with

difficulty in the countries of the whites. The age-long struggles of the white man for God seem doubly terrifying in their purposeless obstinacy when we see these blacks, without writing and without priests, acknowledging a divine being which created the world, but wise enough to reject any religious ritual. When the first travellers questioned them, they gave the great answer that that being was far too high to trouble himself about the doings of men.

The vagueness of such a faith, combined with a definite moral code and organization, in a primitive people untouched by outside influences, proves that none of the great religions, and none of the great colonial, so-called ruling peoples was necessary to establish order and beget community, and that while savagery may lead men to war, idleness need not lead to brutality. The state of Adam had here advanced only to the first stage of civilization, but men were happier before knowing the splendours of the white man's life, for, to achieve them, they had to work. Other negro peoples, exposed for centuries to the influence of European religions and civilizations, have all the same remained, to this very day, half animals.

What, then, could the happy people of Uganda, at the source of the Nile, acquire from the tardy whites?

VIII

In a deep, green park which knows no drought, on the northern shores of Lake Victoria, pretty houses, like a fantasy of Puvis de Chavannes, lie in the shade of ancient sycamores, surrounded by gardens in perpetual flower. Between them, on smooth roads of red earth, the motors glide by to the

golf course, past high acacias with big yellow blossoms. Two negroes are rolling the course with an ox harnessed to the roller, which clatters faintly, its handle-bar sometimes flashing silver in the shining brown hand that guides it. That is how the lords of the earth live in Entebbe, the little Washington of Uganda, but in the more northerly New York, Kampala, there is a hum of traffic, from seven hills rise the churches of almost as many Christian sects, and the tropical helmet becomes the bearded Carmelite Brothers just as well as the nuns, who wear it over their coifs, and have left not one of their voluminous petticoats at home. Beside the white saints, the white man's aeroplane, on its flight from London to Cape Town, lands once a week: the English hail it with excitement, the natives do not even turn their heads.

Yet the planters live not only on the lake side; far up, in the midst of the jungle, in Fort Portal they have built handsome tropical houses: in their gardens they grow strawberries and violets, narcissi and crocuses, just as if they were in Devonshire. Here, to the south of Lake Albert, on the Congo frontier, where the great motor roads cross, conquerors and natives, on certain days, meet in the market. Almost completely muffled up in their shrill-coloured robes worn Greek fashion, the Buganda approach, carrying on their heads gourds with delicate necks or earthenware pots in Cretan forms: many of the women stand still as statues: their hair is dressed in plaits, after the fashion of the Roman empresses, and all of them seem to have something classic about them. The half-naked shepherds beside them look less civilized as they stand leaning on their crooks, as the shepherd has stood for thousands of years. Naked pigmies stretch out their hairy arms towards the little bundles of salt which the others hold hesitatingly out to barter.

With his inscrutable and avid eyes, the Indian, offering Europe's treasures for sale in his corrugated iron stall, dominates them all. And while the negroes tender him the English silver that they have earned in hard labour on the farms, he gives them in exchange oil-lamps, tea-kettles, umbrellas, banjos, safety pins, old tyres. But the lord and master of the Indian is the white-clad Englishman, who, rolling by in his Ford, is still a demigod—for how long?

When, in the sixties, the first Englishmen discovered the country, and in the nineties began slowly to exploit it, everything went well until the negroes began to rebel against the missionaries: why should they only have one wife and not half a dozen? That was all very well for the poor man who could only afford one. Could it be immoral? They did not know that in Europe, a man can have only one, but can take his neighbour's wife unpunished, while here they have many, but can take none unpunished. They only knew that people wanted to rob them of a custom on which their social system was based, and so rebelled and fought. At the end of his life, King Mutesa regretted having let the missionaries into his country, for the Catholic Carmelite Brothers, being French, opposed the British Anglicans. And the people disliked a great many other things which the treaty of 1890 with the English government imposed on King Mutesa's son. Yet, when he began to fight, the king was defeated and deported, and a phantom of a royal life arranged for his son, who to-day resembles his forefathers as much as a captive eagle resembles a wild one. Since 1905, the country has been quiet.

Thus, really without war, the English could only win the precious land by taking over as many forms and names as possible, by leaving to the chiefs a superficial jurisdiction and a feeling of participation in the government, and yet reserving their right of veto on the humblest policeman, like the Holy

Roman Emperor at the nomination of the medieval bishops. And just as King Mutesa supported his counts in their struggle, the English secretly back up their missionaries in theirs, so that they may give the negro schools and sanitation, but exercise no religious compulsion. The reward of so much shrewdness and perseverance is rich enough. They hold a land which completes their trade and air routes. They raised 200,000 negroes in the world war and used them against their German neighbours in East Africa. Their English goods have found a new market, and 90 per cent of the most important products, representing a value of £2,000,000 are disposed of in the Empire. The Uganda budget has for some years past shown a surplus of over a million.

But, it may be asked, have they in return enslaved these three million negroes? On the contrary, here is a list of the benefits conferred on the negro since the discovery and occupation of the country.

Two hundred thousand children—exactly the same number as that of the forces raised in the war—the sons of those who for centuries had no writing, now learn Swahili and English and a trade: a good many become chauffeurs. The white medicine man rescues many adults and children from death, and since large tracts of jungle have been closed or cleared, the death-bringing fly, and with it sleeping sickness, is dying out. If the negro wishes to migrate, it is no longer a matter of months: he can try his luck over behind Lake Kioga, for the white man's steamer is there for everybody, the fare is small, and he can come back richer than he went. The herds of elephants break into the plantations more rarely than they did, to destroy all the crops in an hour or two: the government can keep down their numbers, watch the herds and stop them breaking in.

The life and work of the negroes have grown more refined.

Their huts are of clay instead of fibre, their beds are broader. The fruits of the earth grow to-day as they always grew, but there was a time when the sugar-cane grew wild, and they merely tore up a cane in passing, bit into it, sucked the juice out and threw the cane away. Now the canes are cut regularly from the fields and rolled away on railway-lines under the corrugated iron roof of the sugar factory, and to induce the negroes to come to-morrow, and yet again, the master has set up their pretty huts near by. While they used to smoke wild tobacco, they now cultivate it in even rows, and buy with their earnings the fabulously beautiful cigarettes of Europe. While once they went to the wild coffee bush, gathered the red berries from the ground, roasted them and drank the juice, now they crouch under the even clusters, pick them, collect their fruit first in baskets, then in sacks, till the lorry comes, weighs it all up and carries it off.

In the trunk of a tree with yellowish-green fruits their forefathers had of old made gashes to collect a sticky sap, like the Red Indians whom Columbus saw playing with a big, black ball which to his astonishment bounced marvellously. Now the Buganda has learned to plant the rubber trees in regular rows, to whet his knife, to cut at fixed places at a fixed time, to a fixed depth and in a fixed direction, and then to return with his little pail early in the morning when the sap flows most abundantly. In the neighbouring factory, he sees the machines first cutting, then pressing the quickly curdled milk in strips or sheets and wonders at the ingenuity of the white man.

For he has shown him new things too in his old land. Once he collected raw iron ore for arrows, and still does so; but at the white man's command, he seeks and finds in the mountain a lovelier metal, which shines in the sun. The white man calls it gold and seems greedy to get more

and more of it. But he looks almost as greedily on the little green shrub with the fluffy fruit which he brought from far off, and which has here increased to millions. He gave the negro the seed free, urges him to take care of the plant, plants fields of a quarter of an acre to five acres for him, and when the lorry comes to fetch the sacks the pay is good. Here the Nile first makes the acquaintance of cotton, at first on its banks, then on the decks of the Nile steamers. Through all the centuries it did not know it. A fateful connection has here been opened up, and no man knows whether it will curse or bless.

To produce all this for the white man, nearly half a million natives, an eighth of the population, have turned labourer, 90 per cent working on the land. Though a far-sighted government may prohibit forced labour, and lets the majority of the negroes work on their own account, yet it was white enterprise that first turned savage people into labourers. The wages are twelve shillings a month: only a few artisans and chauffeurs earn as much as forty. As a bushel of bananas costs forty cents, and sweet potatoes twenty, he has, even when his wife helps, four shillings a month over. He cannot earn more, for the rubber belongs to the white man, coffee and sugar for the most part to the Indian, and the cotton brings in less every year. If he wants to send his son to the high school, his profit is nearly eaten up: if several women work with him, he can buy something. He goes to the village, where a negro sits at his sewing machine, has himself measured for a shirt and trousers, sits down on the steps and waits for his suit. And he can buy a hat too, a pocket lamp, and, if the policeman is not looking, a glass of whisky.

But he has been picking cotton in the sun for eight hours, his wife has stood for ten swallowing dust at the ginning machine, hunting is almost a thing of the past, and if he

wants to sleep off a late night, he is wakened or punished. He is certainly free, but where are the times when he sowed for a month and reaped for five? Now the world is so full of things that he degenerates if he has nothing to do but cut off a bunch of bananas in the morning. The care-free life of his fathers, interrupted only by war, has gone. What the Christian padre tells him, that there are gods, his grandfather had told him long ago: it is the same thing as with the coffee: it was there before, only now it is tidier. And in exchange, his daughters do what they like; since they can no longer be sold, because it is immoral, they are no longer safeguarded as sound young merchandise, and since the white man levies hut-taxes instead of the old poll-tax, the family crowd together in one hut, and nobody knows who is his bedfellow.

If the white man awakened the negro, good and well. Perhaps he awoke more quickly than was expected. The grandson of a cowherd who never even heard of books and writing, now acts Horatio in the school play at Kampala, and the white ladies in the hall clap applause. It is hardly to be expected that he will ignore the newspapers. He can pick out the places he learned in the geography lesson: he thinks it all out and one evening, explains to his father, sitting in front of his clay hut, why the white men have looked so worried of late, why there is less planting and less pay, why, over in the coffee field, the berries lie rotting on the ground, why the rubber trees are running wild and creepers are throttling the aloe. For in the last few years, the forest has begun to encroach on the clearings made thirty years ago. The jungle is taking its children back, and why?

The young negro can tell the old one. Sorting letters in the post office, he has read the papers and learned that, in the last seven years, the exports of Uganda have doubled,

but their value has decreased to half. Can it be that the white men are hard pressed? He reads too that the white artisan earns £40 a month here, while his black mate, for nearly the same work, earns only 40s. The white man certainly needs more, he is lord of the world. But does he need twenty times as much as the black man? And can the negro help feeling a certain pride in himself when the white man who would hardly eat at the same table or play a game of football with him, serves him standing behind the counter, and when the black hand pushes back a piece of stuff, forthwith hauls down another which the customer may like better?

And what if the interesting post office clerk were one day to examine more closely the revolver that his brother, the policeman, has learned to fire, reckoning the while that only two thousand whites live in this great land, scattered among three and a half million negroes, who know how to hunt the elephant and the leopard and have won many wars? Perhaps a savage race with so much strength and natural culture will one day spread slowly over the lands cultivated by the white man, and will take back its children—just like the jungle.

IX

At the source of the Nile, close by the falls, there lies a block of grey granite bearing a tablet: "Speke found this source of the Nile in 1862." A long road through the virgin forests of history led to this tablet.

How many nations have laboured in the exploration of this river! Of the five great discoverers, Speke, Grant, Baker and Stanley were British, Emin a Jew. How much strength and suffering these figures mean—how much fate, how little happiness! And yet, nearly all who strove returned, or wished

to return, to suffering and danger. A magic power seems to dwell in this continent as in no other, an invisible magnet which, however, only acts on men with iron in them. Not all who went were weary of Europe, but none returned weary of Africa: most were seduced by the personal freedom which no white land can offer, many, too, by the sexual freedom which is very rarely mentioned.

How varied were the occasions which turned these men into Nile explorers, their character and motives, their end and their fame! Only their struggles and their sufferings were alike, and, in the solitude created by an age without telegraphy and wireless, heavier and darker than those of an explorer of to-day could be. The enterprise, the adventures of those who achieved less spectacular results than the five great discoverers were not inferior to theirs, for when a man sets out for unexplored Africa, abandoning his home and his family, his career and his money, merely to explore a remote river at its sources, everything about him becomes interesting, his motives and his aims, his public bearing and his secret self, his temperament, his outlook, his relations with white men and black, with missionaries and orientals, and, when it is all over, the reports he writes, which reveal more of him than he meant to divulge. One was driven forth by restlessness, a second by curiosity, a third by ambition, a fourth by discontent, a fifth by eagerness to discover new plants and animals. Many were moved by a misanthropy which only subsided in the presence of the negro. For all of them defend the negro. Stanley was the only one to prefer the company of white men to that of black.

Is it a wonder that all these beings, in their passionate years, utterly alone, without any standard of comparison, cut off from the joys and sorrows of their fellow-beings, their eyes fixed immovably on one goal lying somewhere in the

jungle, should lose their sense of proportion? Would it not rather be a wonder if any of them should keep it? Forced perpetually to sing their own praises, even when they do not exaggerate their adventures, it is the best of them who feel embarrassed as they write, and the born writers among them by no means keep the best diaries. An ironic Englishman like Speke remains an exception by the simplicity with which he expresses feelings magnified by others into heroics.

It is the sense of proportion they lose: even the best of them distort their achievement by a kind of megalomania.

What bitterness they knew when the armchair scientists contested their results! They had lived for years among wild animals, learned to bear with the superstition of every chief, with the mockery that a man should suffer so much to find the source or the course of a river, the configuration of a lake, but when they reached home, the same disbelief awaited them. Speke, on his return, saw professors proving with upraised finger that the sources could not lie where he had imagined he had found them, and even why they could not lie there. Whole societies were founded to prove him wrong. Punch celebrated him, but the Government gave him neither office nor reward, nor the knighthood he would have liked: a crocodile and a hippopotamus as supporters was the reward of the discoverer of the source of the Nile.

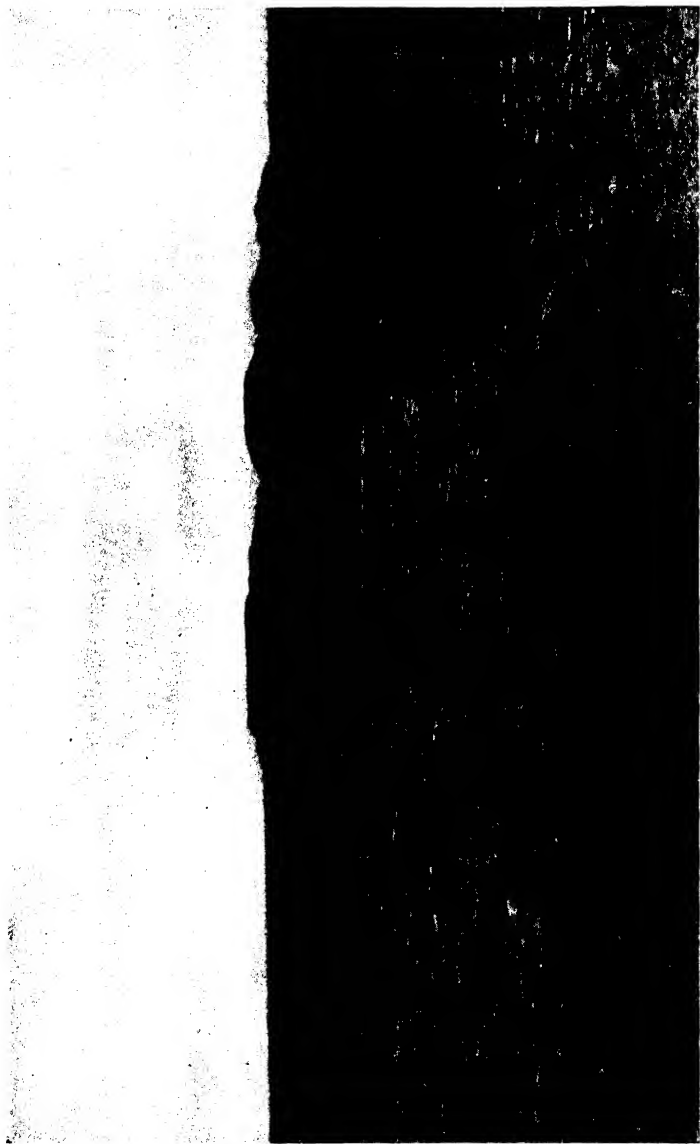
Baker, the most favoured by nature and fate of all the Nile explorers, the one whose gigantic physique overcame every hardship, who went hunting in England when he was over seventy, the great pioneer in the struggle against slavery, was reduced to silence when, after his departure, he saw the suppressed slave-dealers restored.

What disappointments awaited Stanley, who had made the greatest conquests! When he found Livingstone, he was first regarded as an impostor, and the letters he brought with him



[Karakashian Bros., Khartoum

A HERD OF ELEPHANTS



LAKE KIOGA

[Egyptian Ministry of Public Works]

were branded as forgeries. But when no discoverer could deny the discovery of the Congo, people began to talk of his cruelties, so that this amateur of genius should not enjoy his fame. And Stanley, the most ambitious of them all, had not Speke's serenity to find peace simply in the consciousness of his achievements. Even Stanley died bitter. All, moreover, had to see their maps constantly corrected by later travellers: the map of the lakes forming the source of the Nile varied perpetually from 1850 to 1877, at first lying far apart, then growing smaller, coming nearer, as when a telescope is slowly adjusted.

If only their fame had lived! But where is it to-day? Each country knows the names of those of its sons who achieved so much, but practically nothing more. The only immortality the discoverer can attain, his name on the map, lives on only in hidden corners, but is written nowhere in letters of flame on mountains, rivers, lakes or springs, where it should stand. A few tried to ensure their fame on a small scale by giving to new species of animals and plants their own Latinized names. The great discoverers could not do that: they chose the names of kings and queens, of presidents of the geographical societies which had sent them out, and only the childlike Stanley had imagination enough to name the Congo, when he had discovered it, the Livingstone River, and the Mountains of the Moon, the Gordon Bennett Range, and both names soon vanished.

The chivalrous Duke of the Abruzzi, who was the first to climb the summit of these mountains, named its three highest peaks after the three great discoverers of the Nile, but these names stand on no general map, and nobody knows them. A town on the Congo is called after Stanley and a fine grey crane too. A gulf on Lake Victoria after Speke. Nothing bears the name of Grant or Baker. But the importance

of the kings after whom the great lakes were named has long since faded, and when the Italians say Lago Alberto, they think of Carlo Alberto, but who Albert was, even to-day, outside of England, the crowd does not know.

And was it not for the crowd, for humanity, that these great men plunged into their adventure? The names of the source of the Nile and its great falls, Ripon, Owen, and Murchison, called after a minister and two professors, have no meaning save for the scholar.

What lay behind these men when their eyes closed in death can only be felt by those who have read their diaries and compared them with their own little adventures in jungle and steppe, where mere fever or the failure of a hunt raises the question of life or death. That situation, magnified to enormous dimensions, can give some sense of the sufferings and achievements of these men. For what did it mean to seek the source of a river in those lands? Did it mean, as it does to-day, to seek and map a route, equipped with money and weapons, presents and provisions, maps, compass, and instruments, after a careful study of all the relevant literature?

It meant to assemble the men every morning, to distribute the baggage among a few hundred men and animals, to provide for water, to examine every saddle-girth, to point the way, to coax, convince or cajole the negro, who shrinks before the most trivial detail. It meant in heat, storm and plagues of insects to be tirelessly lord and master of a hundred primitive men, whose obedience depended on the look and gesture of the white man, to heal the sick and bury the dead, to command even in sickness. It meant to recapture and punish deserters among the porters, to negotiate with crafty chiefs for corn, and to bridle their lust for gifts. It meant to be taken prisoner and to have the wits to escape, to struggle at midday with a stream in flood and in the evening with leopards in

the camp. It meant losing chests of bullets on which life depended at the passage of a river, then sending out boats in search of a white man whom rumour spoke of, who might have bullets to spare. It meant living for years without women, or only with black women, and at the same time being cut off for years from all news of home.

Such were these men, struggling continually against men, animals, and the elements, criticized, yet adored like gods, helping everybody, solving every problem, without a pause, without a rest, moving without a port through pathless jungles and steppes for months, for years at a time. The wonderful river, to whose discovery they sacrificed their lives, gave them in return struggle and sorrow, the joy of the wilderness and the disillusion of the homecoming.

X

In mild radiance, the morning star stands over the yellow-grey expanse of Lake Albert at the point where it narrows down into the river. Just as time, in its perpetual flow, links up great and conspicuous events, nourishes them, and in its turn nourishes those to come, many rivers seem merely to flow from lake to lake, yet often bear along in their narrow course stranger hazards than on those radiant surfaces whose broad sheen dazzles the eyes of men. The Victoria Nile, on its way from the great falls, traverses only a short corner of Lake Albert: with all its youthful might the river rushes through the lake, takes up its wealth of water, and, its substance doubled, hurries on northward.

But in the twilight before the dawn it seems to stand still: oily and motionless, the flood reflects in silhouette the life on its banks. While in the east, by the great falls from which

it comes, a bulwark of tender pink piles up, and a few cloudlets are already tinged with gold in the middle of the pale blue-green sky, while the silence around is audible, awaiting with bated breath this quivering hour of dawn as if it were the coming of a great man, the western sky towards the Congo still shimmers to the water-blue zenith in pale pearl colour. Suddenly, within a few seconds, with the rapidity of all equatorial light, the east flames yellow-red, then crimson, like a brook flowing behind the rigid outlines of a parasol acacia.

The light has broken the silence. A few geese cackle, flying up from a dune to the east above the lake-head, but the white egrets sit motionless in the ambatch. Yonder a solitary grey heron, who has spent the night standing on one leg, makes the first move, draws in his long neck, stretches out his pointed beak, spreads his wings and flies away low over the water. Soon there is movement everywhere. Sideways-twisted horns sway slowly on a few black heads, suspicious eyes peer into the new light, while a few tufts of hair twitch behind them—it is a buffalo family, velvety dark, broad-browed and threatening.

Not far away, at the edge of the forest, half covered by the high grass, the white rhinoceros is leaving the river. This is the third in the company of the three jungle giants: as big as a young elephant, with smaller eyes, but more monstrous than either elephant or hippopotamus, light grey in colour, slow-moving, crowned with double horns, one on the snout and one a little farther back, like a fabulous king crowned in a nightmare with a fearful crown. The trapeze-shaped head with the two enormous pig's ears, the broad nose, the ridge along the clumsy neck, the stumpy legs—everything is ungainly even to the little peering eyes which see so badly, making a whole apparently as helpless and dull

as the elephant is quick and clever: the rhino seems more than any of them to be a relic of an earlier world, and as he moves on in a slow trot, dragging his amorphous mass among the delicate feathers of the acacia, it is as if a shadow of hell had fallen on the bright soul of a fragile human being, for even this monster feeds only on ethereal things, on twigs, bark and herbs.

With the growing light, the apparent rigidity vanishes too from the surface of the water. In majestic breadth, still a lake and yet already a river, the Nile has left its second source-lake, crossing the great sandbanks which would fain stop its course, powerful and resolute like a man fully armed, marching on to fresh battles. In the west, on its left bank, it sees the green, spreading forest of the Congo region, in the east the yellow bush. Soon it feels once more firmly bedded: after a stretch of some ten miles, it narrows down into a broad peaceful stream with open water.

And now it has been christened a second time: this stretch of a hundred and fifty miles is often called the Albert Nile, and that patron well suits its clear, navigable course in the park-like land it first flows through. For even when it narrows later, and the swamps begin to attack it on both sides, it maintains its open character. Gradually the banks begin to approximate to the river: from the steppe, reeds and rushes advance, farther off, green strips show little backwaters which the swamps hold fast, not letting them discharge, but even where the valley narrows, the river remains clearly bounded and never disperses.

Where the land by the river is cultivated, it might be the Thames: grey-blue with green pools, coves and islets in the ever shallower stream, little lakes spreading out, a clump of forest in deep shadow behind the reeds; the bittern, the kingfisher, even the sycamore bear none too strange a shape. But

the human beings coming to the water are naked, and most of them may well be so, for the Madi, who live here, are built on classic lines, even to the women, as long as they are young. They have a special costume, no kirtle, but only a bunch of fresh leaves tied on behind, waving like the tail of an ostrich and always clean, for it is picked and bound on fresh every morning. If the young men have come with them to the water, they lay down their own spears, and, with a cautious movement, lay their short shoulder-skins beside them: then, first pushing aside the water-weeds, they wet forehead and mouth as if in a ritual act, and when at last they stand completely in the water, they do not grunt and shiver, like the white man, but maintain a kind of shapely repose. Then they come out, stick their heads through the short skin which they throw over their shoulders, take up their spears and leave the Nile.

And women bearing jars come to the river, while others carry off fish, a naked black man lies rowing in a black dugout, with a long black spear beside him. Against the tall ficus the shepherd leans in silence, but the cattle here are not the long-horned cattle of Uganda; the huts coming into sight beyond look poorer, the banana plantations more sparse. Farther to the north, where the forest nears the river, and the land rises gently to the west, towards the Congo watershed, where hills advance, the antelopes too come to the water, and herds of red-brown congoni run along the banks.

Suddenly the river narrows, once more granite, that enemy of broad and easeful river-life, approaches, once more the ships must stop. The rocks force the yielding stream into a narrow pass of two hundred feet, tear it at Nimule from its eastward flow through a sudden, sharp angle of 300° to the north-west, and plunge it into a new chain of rapids. Once more, as in its childhood, the Nile feels transformed

into a narrow mountain torrent, a second river comes hurrying from the east to strengthen and inspire it, the river bed cuts deep like a mountain river, and from this point at Nimule, that is, the name it bears, Bahr-el-Jebel, the mountain river, for about four hundred and fifty miles, as far as the 9th parallel. Once more, with all its waters, immediately below Nimule, it is squeezed into falls sixty feet wide, and in the succeeding cataracts it never exceeds a width of 450 feet. In splendid isolation, irresistible and unresisting, like a character somewhat at odds with itself, the Nile pours downhill, a turbulent river.

And, as if to give expression to this stretch, a natural bridge has grown at Nimule, such as hardly another river on earth possesses in this form, consisting of rank water-plants, so strong that it bears the elephant from one bank to the other, and so powerfully rooted that when floods have destroyed it, it closes up again of itself.

These spurs of the ranges from which it comes are the last mountains it sees; the Nile takes leave of the mountains, of the storm and folly of its youth. Reason and gravity, the plain, begin to govern its course, it turns into a slow-flowing river and as if to erect on its banks a symbol of its vanishing youth, a monument of the mountains, there rises in Rejaf, exactly at the point where the river, now calming to the plain, again becomes navigable, a solitary conical hill, strangely abrupt and as steep as a pyramid. The earthquakes which sometimes shake it are explained by the natives in their vivid way: the hill, which once stood farther downstream, flew through the air and buried the human beings at this spot, the cattle took flight, now the men are stirring, they are trying to get out, they are still seeking their old cattle.

Here the Soudan begins. At the foot of the pyramid, the last foam-wreaths on the water show how stormy was the time the river has lived through. Laden with alluvial sub-

stance from the mountains, it deposits these last evidences of its youth along its banks: by doing so it raises its level, and, the rain co-operating, it endangers those banks, floods and backwaters arise and the memory of a stormy past lays its heavy hand on the Nile's present.

From now on, downstream from Rejaf and Juba, though the Nile again becomes navigable, and remains so from 5° to 18°, for about twelve hundred miles, none but master-pilots can navigate it, and they are rare. For not only must they follow the meanderings of the river through all the swamps and lagoons, among all the islands and sandbanks, they must steer with the steamer the boats which accompany it on either side, and in addition, three cargo-boats fore and aft, a regular flotilla of boats all fastened together like a gigantic raft that only certain Dongolans or Nubians from the north, natives of Assouan, can steer day and night.

The wave which leapt the falls in the morning at the sudden bend by Nimule can flow past the Rejaf pyramid by evening. It can see the sun sink, tinged with the smoke of the burning bush, vanishing behind violet-grey clouds, reappearing below them, shimmering orange, like love after temptation. In Venetian colours, pink and blue and black, then pale-green and salmon-pink, mauve and velvet black, sky and water gleam and darken. Then the sun casts its last red ray, girdled like Saturn, by flat black smoke-clouds, by rings. Again as in the morning, long files of wild duck fly across its disk northward, racing the wave. White herons wing away over the ever calmer river, ibises in their flight stretch their legs out far behind, their heads and necks far ahead into the sky, which now shines saffron-yellow, then begins to veil itself in blueish shadow. In the greying world, with the scream of the homing geese, the first great star begins to glow.

The wind swells a little, the low reed-grass on the banks ripples in longer waves, the frogs strike up their monotonous chorus, from the darkness comes now and then the grunt of a hippo heaving its fantastic body from the water, for now it goes feeding. And only now, when all the world is dark, when all the antelopes have gone home from their evening drink, the last creature of all, the lion, creeps up and drinks the water of the Nile, waving its long tail.

XI

When the new day dawns, the wave finds itself caught up into the great combat between water and land which began in the night. The Nile has entered the region of the swamps; for a long stretch from 5° to 10° N. lat. they determine its fate and that of the whole country; over a distance about the same length as that of the Seine the Nile can rather be called the main artery of a swamp than a river.

Sluggish rivers of the plain succumb more readily to such a fate than rapid, cold, mountain streams, and if the Nile came to an end on the 10th and not on the 31st degree, that end would be forced but comprehensible. But when the giant river leaves the swamps, it has only a third of its whole course behind it: thus it meets with this adventure astonishingly young. It has no greater one to face, so long as nature is its enemy. But later, when it is older and stronger, men can learn from this battle of the water with the land: supposing it should occur to them to imitate in stone the dams which here are made of plants?

Into this battle between land and water, the third protagonist enters, the wind, the ally of neither, merely an *agent provocateur*, egging them on to still greater violence against each

other. Even in this battle, it is hard to say who began, whether it was the windings of the river which made it possible for the swamps to form, or whether the river winds more violently under the pressure of circumstances. Certain it is that the river, beset by strong trade winds, first loses its bank in the east, and that its broad bed narrows almost suddenly into funnel-shaped coils. As the plains on both sides lose all their incline, and the tributaries, unable to discharge, form pools and lagoons, instead of a clear river-system, a watery wilderness is created which, without coherence and almost without a current, at the mercy of the winds, disperses itself in countless channels.

And as all anarchy, provided it has a central point, of its very nature spreads and strengthens, the battle of the water with the land finds its centre in detached masses, in new islands. When a river which once ran a firm and contained course between its banks suddenly loses itself in a maze of channels, all the laws which govern water in the neighbourhood of land are relaxed, like the laws governing the existence of land in the domain of the sea. When the swamp has first formed in the shadow of grasses and reeds, this loose mesh of plants is multiplied a thousandfold, and day by day, and year by year, the whole chaos must become more and more impenetrable. That is what has happened on the Upper Nile in the course of centuries, and just as the dry jungle checked every horseman, this jungle arising from the waters seemed to resist every ship. Nobody has yet counted the animals and men who have perished here in the fight with the swamps.

This chaos seems to have been formed in the first place by the expansion of the main stream, which has no banks, and of its two equally big tributaries, the Bahr-el-Ghazal and Bahr-el-Zeraf, the Gazelle and Giraffe Rivers. All this region, covering an area of about twenty-five thousand square miles,

an equilateral triangle with Mongalla in the south, Malakal and the junction of the Jur and the Ghazal in the north, lies for the greater part of the year under water. How great is the anarchy of the elements in this region, which is half as big again as Switzerland, is most clearly seen in the vagueness of the maps. In many parts, say between Lado and Bor, between 5° and 6° N. lat., the geographers alter their lines year by year. Or, faced with water-courses in perpetual change, they dispute as to whether the Arab has a second mouth, or whether it is the problematical Bahr-el-Homr, or whether certain islands are stationary or floating, and here it is a question of rivers and islands hundreds of miles in length. There are water-courses which, sometimes open and sometimes choked with plants, suddenly vanish and discharge into one of the great tributaries. As whole stretches are inaccessible, it has only been possible in recent times to ascertain by means of air-photos how a great water-course shifts about in the course of a decade.

Once the water has attacked the land, and, by flooding it above and hollowing it out below, has detached masses, such masses seek to find a home elsewhere, turn against the water, and, at breaches and landslides in the banks, even dislodge it. When such a mass again finds terra firma, and is no longer hollowed out from below, aquatic plants take root in it in ever-increasing numbers, and the swamp begins to grow, like the jungle, from above and below at the same time. In a few holes moss settles, soaks up the moisture and fosters the growth of new mosses, which, mingled with the coarse grass, soon invade the pools. Laden with a thickening surface of overgrowth, the mass of land settles in more and more firmly, the water is ousted, the pool disappears.

These vegetable blocks or dams, the barriers which the

Arabs call sidd and the English sudd, gigantic masses of floating vegetation, compacted by the strength of the current, work their way with the river to narrow points, especially to bends, block up the main stream, force its waters to take detours through shallow side-channels, till the current in the real middle ceases and mud settles on the roots, in which they can luxuriate at their ease. Instead of a river, there lies a firm vegetable path. And now where is the river—where is the Nile?

Like a creature enchanted, it is here and there at the same time; the water from those great lakes in the country of the Mountains of the Moon disperses and runs away into a labyrinth of channels, inlets and lakes, lagoons and ponds, extending over a breadth of miles. While the river covers as much as fifteen miles, the channel proper shrinks to about six yards. These watercourses, overgrown with springy turf and covered with dense masses of weed, form paths so elastic that the animals do not feel the danger: the heavier they are, the more readily they sink, and the antelope or buffalo which sets foot on it sinks into the depths: their narrow feet kill them, but even the elephant, for all his wit, has sometimes succumbed to these treacherous paths. The ant alone is cleverer still, building antheaps three feet high so as to save them from high water. But the negro drives the game into these regions, just as the northern hunter decoys it into the bogs.

These carpets of matted vegetation, like the fabulous seaweed fields of Columbus, recall the frozen rivers of the north when the ice breaks up at the banks and lumps drift downstream, piling up till they block the current, but then the spring sun comes and thaws away the obstruction that here yields only to an occasional gust of wind. If such a mass is torn from the whole, entire herds are cut off: even the hippo has been seen starving to death on phantom islands of grass.

This is done by the wind, the eternal revolutionary, ever stirring up anew this battle between water and land; in a single night it can drive the grass islands of a lagoon into the main stream: the next night, its hostile brother from the opposite quarter may redistribute the whole, and suddenly clear the river. It can press floating islands upwards and thus bring them to a standstill, the wind throws them back into the open water they left behind. In distant mountains it can multiply the rainfall tenfold, so that the Nile and its tributaries overflow. What yesterday was a sea, is to-day a meadow, and to-morrow, literally to-morrow, a sea again.

If only these barriers, in their chaotic heaps, would sink! When, at the same place and the same time the papyrus is renewed in everlasting growth above and below water, when mud and rotting debris, piled up by the water oozing among the roots, blocks every channel, and a storm suddenly breaks through such a bar, the uprooted masses are violently hurled against the next bar, to thicken and strengthen it still more. Countless dead fish and even suffocated crocodiles and hippos are washed up on to these huge nets. Thus the elements contend, among plants as among men, when in a general anarchy the lower orders decay and the upper run to seed and drift. In such catastrophes, the grass-dams pile up to a height of fifteen feet. And yet in this exhausting struggle of a thousand little enemies against the one great river, nature has provided for a positive result. The river ploughs the land, for the dry earth constantly sinks, then refills. A phenomenon which elsewhere takes centuries, the shifting of a river-bed, is quickly carried out on the Mountain Nile and is constantly repeated.

For two thousand years, men had spent their strength in vain struggling against this element: wind, water, and land, all enemies of each other, seemed secretly agreed that man

was to be held off: from Nero on, every expedition proceeding up the Nile came to grief against these plant bars and could advance no further. Just as the invincible river has changed its domain at its own free will, it has in centuries completely altered its course.

But in Emin's time, man mastered the river. After frightful deluges of rain, which in 1878 flooded even Khartoum and devastated Egypt, after communication had been cut off for two years by these giant barriers, Marno, the Austrian, succeeded first in cutting through the barrier after six months' work with a hundred men, but not until after 1900 did the English succeed in mastering the primeval barrier. To make the Nile navigable, to overcome this elemental world of mud and the vegetation of ages, gun-boats and mission-steamers united, power took for its ally religion, which prepares its way.

Even in the technique of this struggle, a parable lies hid. First the engineer, steaming up from Khartoum, must find out where the river is and where the bank, otherwise he might waste his strength on masses which are not islands. If he attempts to set fire to them, so that he can break them up more easily, he must reckon with changes of wind and danger to his steamer. When the attack proper begins, he rams stakes into the grassy surface, ties ropes round them, and fastens the ropes to the steamer standing with its head upstream: then the engines are set going, slow at first, then quicker, half-steam, full steam, then reverse: thus he can pull lumps of the bar away just as dentists used to draw teeth. Sometimes the plants are stronger than the stakes, even when eight men hold them: the art lies in the playing of the ropes.

But if the grass island is too old, or too heavy, or the swamp too deep, or if the current pressing against it is too weak, the engineer tries to map out the land he has to destroy

in squares, first has the grass mown with short swords, then the roots hacked in pieces. Then a hundred naked negroes stand breast high in the morass, striving to get the better of the weeds with knives above ground and with spades below, dripping with sweat and slime: but if a strong current comes, they must cling swimming to the stouter stems of the papyrus, and fasten the ropes to them, till the steamer tears the half cut squares loose and sends them drifting away downstream, while the men quickly loosen their stakes, clamber up the sides of the steamer, and collapse exhausted on deck.

Night means danger. While the world rests, a half loosened square is detached upstream; perhaps driven by the wind, it drifts against the steamer, and in the morning the fortress is besieged. Or the river discovers its strength in the night, itself uproots whole masses, presses them against the steamer, and the steamer against the boats behind it, anchors break, chains snap, wheels bend, the helm is put out of action, and all that in a country where nothing can be replaced. Or a few conquered barriers meet, as in politics, and drift together to form one block. Struggling against such powers and dangers, the English cleared five miles in three months with five steamers and eight hundred Nubian prisoners, without communications, surrounded by excited tribes, among mosquitoes and fever.

And yet even to-day, the vagaries of this long stretch of the river, which, with its banks, has lost all its bearings, cannot be foretold. A few years ago, an unexpected flood detached great fields of lightly rooted plants from the lagoons, washed them together at the bends, and thus blocked five miles of the river for three weeks at Shambe. What was to be done? A sixty-mile canal was dug to connect the Nile with the Zeraf and thus save water from being lost in the swamps:

it was so quickly choked that only a channel of twenty-four feet can be navigated. Other canals are completely choked in twenty years.

Why did a certain shrub suddenly luxuriate in little forests after a very dry year in places where it formerly grew only in single plants or in groups? Where lagoons and open water had once lain, the seed of the grass, in this year of drought, had been able to settle and to grow so high that its head was above the water when it returned. Now, as it had breathing space, it could live on in the water and grow in thickets.

Thus the secrets of growth confront the navigator yearly with new and confusing problems, but the great river, beset by a thousand little enemies, can overcome the dangers of the swamps with its inexhaustible life force. Though it does not succumb to them, and in the end takes flight into the desert, yet it loses so much water in this great sponge that its whole future is determined by the loss and with it the future of Egypt.

XII

Solitude broods over the lagoon country of the Nile. Man, penetrating to the river only at a few dry places, animals, their habits disturbed by waters and shallows, can only live here in certain groups and species and along certain reaches, but fish, birds, and reptiles are in their element.

In the southern half, perhaps as far as Shambe, where solid land lies in compact masses, life is more active, as the quiet river, flowing with a fairly strong current in a wide bed, keeps within its banks even at flood times. Soon, however, it is dotted with broad, low-lying islands, and while beyond the banks rich savannahs cover the land, and the palms decrease so rapidly that a group of three palms is marked on the ord-



[Geo. Outer

RUWENZORI



Egyptian Ministry of Public Works

TROPICAL FOREST

nance map, in the river itself, about at Bor, swamp sets in in bed and valley, the higher land retreats westward from its channel, the islands broaden, and the river begins to wind about over the three to six miles breadth of the valley. The silhouette of an acacia, of a doum-palm, even the dome-shaped top of a great sycamore shows where dry land lies. There the yellow spots of the negro huts glimmer near the river or farther off inland, the cattle are driven to the water, the native fishes, harpoons, and hangs the flesh of the hippopotamus he has killed in the sun to dry.

Below Bor, with the swamps, the great solitude begins. For three hundred miles, northward to Lake No, swamps dominate. Even from above, there is nothing distinct to be seen. From the aeroplane, a red-brown undulating surface seems to be held together by a white slime, but everywhere backwaters, pools, and marshes come and go, green and brown, in gently heaving shoals of reeds and papyrus. From the west, where the swamps begin lower down than in the east, a strip of wooded uplands touches the stream at one point only, a low ridge which keeps the waters about six miles away from the river, and forms a kind of watershed between the Nile and Ghazal swamps. As the latter come from the Nile-Congo watershed, the separation which governs half the continent is here caused by a swell six feet high.

Here, in the swamps proper, nourished by a boggy soil, fertilized by the remains of coal and ashes from the yearly bush fires, the grasses flourish.

First comes the papyrus, for on its fibres immortality was first recorded: it has survived for six thousand years, and is no more perishable than the granite rocks in which the same kings hewed their deeds, good and bad. From the banks of the Nile arose the rustling stems in whose shadow slaves rowed the war galleys of Egyptian kings, and when

the pith had been cut in strips by the hands of other slaves, crossed, pressed, and rolled into a fibrous sheet, a third group of superior slaves chronicled on it the glory of those Pharaohs, while a fourth carried the rolls to the tombs, from which they were brought to light in later ages by the curiosity of white men and deciphered by their genius. Of this grass was made the first of those patient pages on which the rulers of the earth, not content with their daily pleasures, sought to secure immortality in fame.

These tall papyrus grasses, rising sometimes to a height of eighteen feet, form miniature dark-green forests, whose eternal rippling lends the whole surface softness and melody. When, at the water's edge, from out and from under the older plants, the younger, lower ones grow, pale green, shut, the crown not yet spread halo-wise, and still attached to their elders in the dark green jungle gloom below, something of herd life seems to emanate from these ever-moving, ever-whispering groups whose gentle murmur swells with the wind till it rustles and creaks.

In comparison with the papyrus, the elephant grass, with its stems like bamboo, looks stiff, ungraceful, male, its pointed upright leaves and brown feathery crown piercing the air like a challenge.

The thick, long-haired pale green fur, with soft curved sheaths, covering the land in hide-shaped clumps, is the um-soof grass, the um-suf of the Bible, which the negroes call "the mother of cotton," growing by the deeper water where the ground is flattest.

Above them all, a fourth plant towers from the water, forming whole groves, a shrub rather than a grass: growing more rapidly than all the other swamp plants, even more rapidly than the rising Nile, it shoots up eighteen feet above the water, always overtopping its highest level, as thick as

a man's arm, conical in shape, yet tapering again towards the root, with spongy wood and a fibrous pith, and little, imperceptibly-curved thorns, sparsely clad with leaves like the mimosa, overhung and festooned with huge, blue-flowering convolvulus. This is the ambatch, six inches thick, of which the negroes make their rafts, so light that a man can shoulder them, but strong enough to bear eight men.

And this grassy world of the lagoons, rippling or stiff, soft or jagged, is held together by blue and mauve water-lilies, by yellow ottelias with candle-shaped pistia plants and water mosses, so that whole ponds look like meadows and whole rivers like starry ribbons.

In the green monotony of this flat landscape, the calls of the birds and the big animals sound less loud than that eternal creaking or hissing of the grasses which answers the wind day and night. Where the swamps begin, an island below Mongalla is inhabited by an elephant family which, for at least fourteen years, has not dared to cross the stream, though just at that point it is narrow. Strange guests of the Nile! Once there were two of them, now they have two young who have eaten down this great island and made it flat and transparent, and placidly watch the weekly steamer pass, voluntary prisoners in a kind of natural Zoo, unique in the world.

Farther downstream, in the lagoon country, only a few, strange creatures dwell.

Here is the home of the eerie race of the white ants, *fatalis* by name and by nature. Whatever they reach, they gnaw to pieces, and in order to lay hold of it, they first darken it, like certain politicians. The things they set out to destroy to their advantage are first undermined by subterranean passages, or covered over with earth: thus branches and tree trunks, to the topmost twigs, fall victim, and not only these, but baskets, chests, and bales. Whatever is left over is armoured

in earth heaps, rising to a height of twelve feet, which only dynamite can destroy. This nocturnal organization only collapses when the leader is killed, and to make the whole thing more romantic, the leader is a woman. When the queen is dead, and only then, the whole state dissolves.

And yet these clever creatures have enemies who are certainly more stupid, but craftier than themselves: as the natives are exceedingly fond of them as food, and have noticed that the young ones creep out of the ant-hill in time of rain, they drum softly on their domes and spheres, and the termites think that rain is falling on the ant-hill: then, when they emerge, the natives shovel them into baskets by the thousand, and the future hope of a state ends in the earthenware pot of a negro family, whose porridge is spicier for once.

In holes by the river, though not in the water, lives the protopterus; making its way through the mud to spawn, it darts hissing on men and animals like a snake. Not only the natives, but even the experts are still in doubt as to whether it is a fish or a reptile. On dry landspits giant lizards lie basking, and poisonous snakes startle the natives and the monkeys, who especially dread them, yet few men are killed by snakes and many by crocodiles.

Here it lives happy, the crocodile: like a member of a Conservative club it spends its days for years on end mostly dozing on the same dry landspit, and yet it is ready every second to glide soundlessly into the water, for on land it is always frightened, in the water always frightful. With their jaws open for minutes at a time, their pointed snouts pressed against the earth, their little eyes half veiled by heavy lids, they lie like stones side by side.

If the crocodile has wandered from the Nile and is pursued, it hurries, defending itself, straight in front of its pursuers

to the maternal river, quicker than a camel. It has finer hearing than all other reptiles, can defend itself earlier, and perhaps that is why it grows so old. God has given it time, for it grows with incredible slowness from one to nine feet; man only increases his height roughly three times. Hated with genuine passion by the native, and even by the dog, who realizes the danger, it is the enemy of all animals and all men, hunts and kills camels, asses, and even cranes: only the three primeval giants are safe, but they do it no harm, and keep to their grasses. Apparently invulnerable, it can endure all kinds of wounds and even burning coals nearly all over its body; it seems indestructible and hence loveless.

Lonely and unsociable as these few animals, there lives and moves in the land of swamps the oddest of all birds, silver grey, with greenish and blue shadows, its head armed with an enormous beak rising from an indrawn neck. This is the shoe-bill, which the Arabs call “the father of the slipper,” and which, on the Nile, lives only here and at the source. With its melancholy, silent figure, always misanthropic, always alone, sudden in all its movements, whether it twists its head through an angle of 360° , or spreads its heavy wings for a moment, or opens the huge pouch which serves it for bill, the whole phenomenon is in harmony with the motionless life of a gigantic swamp quickened by sudden winds, and quite especially so is the fact that it stands on one leg. For all the birds stand on one leg in the swamps.

This motionless silence hums, murmurs, and mutters away to itself, and its sounds resemble its smells. Into the chirping of the insects, the real masters of this region, into the soughing and silken rustling of the grasses, there falls at times the hoarse cry of a misanthropic giant heron, flying low over

the papyrus in alarm, or the shrill scream of a hawk, and the stuffy, indistinguishable smell of rotting roots and fish rises from the forest of green stalks.

In the evening the south wind drops. The bush-fires, which sometimes catch parts of the sudd, glow from the distance, the sun sinks dirty red in this thick air. Now the water-birds begin to wake up and take their evening flight to the interior of the swamp, the kingfishers and cormorants drop from overhanging grasses into the water, great silver fish leap out of the golden-red surfaces of the lagoons, the Nile geese fly northwards in long files. The grunting of the hippos grows clearer as they prepare to seek their supper inland; single goat-suckers utter their flute-like cry, and fire-flies suddenly quicken the loose thicket of the papyrus, already in myriads.

Now, when the evening light has faded to purple, the frogs strike up the long bass-chord of the swamp night, but the creaking sound of the papyrus has sunk to a secret soughing, from which the elfin voices of the night insects rise in higher octaves. Now the swarms of mosquitoes stand like great cloudlets in the yellow gloom of the fading sky, bats dart about among them, and the last swallows, anxiously chirping, seek shelter from the night. Motionless, the egrets stand by the swiftly darkening water of the river. Where do the birds of prey sleep? Do they find some old tree in this infinite swamp, or must they fly to the far mountain ranges? Now the crescent moon is mirrored in the still water by the bank. Over the dark heaving mass of the papyrus, the stars wend their way of light, over the red flickering horizon of the fires of Africa.

XIII

The men stand like the birds. Through the ages they have adapted themselves to their surroundings like these birds of the swamp, with their gaunt limbs, thin necks, small heads, and stilt-like legs, which they use in turn, standing for hours in the swamp with one foot supported on the knee of the other leg: stalk men, crane men, lonely in the Nile lagoons.

What kind of man is the negro? Is it possible to ask what kind of man is the white man? The character of the dark peoples and races runs through a gamut of a hundred colours and shades, just as their skin varies from deep black to light brown. And yet it should be possible to determine in one group of negro peoples the colour of the character which separates every negro tribe of the Nile from the white man. It is best to take the heathen native of the Upper Nile, who, through the centuries, in spite of all the impressions received from white travellers or conquerors, has preserved the nature of the savage better than the Waganda on the equator, with whose innate culture these peoples form a contrast as great as that between animals and men. All the tribes living on the Nile and its tributaries, from 2° to about 12° N. lat., in a region much bigger than France—and there are many millions packed together outside the swamps—show some traits of the savage which neither administration nor navigation, nor the efforts of missionaries, nor even the slave trade, have effaced. Such traits are graven into human groups of similar colour by the pressure of time in widely distant parts of the earth, like the signs and runes which the countenance of the earth bears on its virgin rock.

The peoples, of whom examples are here given, belonging to the so-called Nilotic branch of the Soudan negroes, are

of very impure and mixed stock. From 2° to 6°, that is, from Lake Albert to the beginning of the swamps, these are, in particular, the Lur, the Madi, and the Bari: then, farther downstream to Kosti, the Dinka, the Nuer, and the Shilluk.

All these heathens naïvely reveal the light and dark sides of human nature: their organization is loose, they are guileless, unreflective, and very emotional. These are the jungles of the human soul which the axe of civilization, through the centuries, has never attacked, to lop and sever. In this unpruned thicket of primitive feelings, which, under sun and rain, between sky, steppe, and stream, in the even, dull warmth, grow, succour, and fight each other like the plants in the jungle, the clash of human instincts comes out more clearly, the colours jar more fiercely, or are at least more visible than in the character of the white man, whose ground-tones are only too often painted over. Here we see something like the man of the Garden of Eden, without concessions, qualms, or prejudices, moved to every selfish action by naïve lust, checked, according to his physical strength, by fear of spirits or the chief, and yet urged by sympathy and generosity to love his fellow-men far oftener than the white legend of the black man tells.

"The negro is bad," wrote Baker, who knew the Nilotes better than most explorers, "but not so bad as the white man would be in similar conditions. The passions inherent in human nature affect him, but he has no exaggerated vices as we have. The strong man robs the weak, the tribes fight: what else do we do in Europe? They enslave each other: how long is it since we and America ceased to keep slaves? They are ungrateful, what about us? They are crafty and untruthful: does nothing but truth prevail among us? Physically they are our equals: why should we not educate them to be our

spiritual equals too? A black child has a keener intelligence than a white, but soon it runs wild like an unbroken horse."

And as man really loses his innocence, not by knowledge of the other sex, but by the knowledge of gold, guile and greed ruin the simplicity of the rich negro. If he is a passionate gambler from childhood, losing first the pebbles in the sand, and later his freedom with his cattle and his hut, he does not lose heart all the same: but the powerful and the rich man—for that is the same thing among the negroes—no longer plays with pebbles or dances, no longer dons devils' horns: he turns solitary, suspicious, and malicious, brooding in revenge, greed and dread of murder, exactly like a luckless white dictator, only that he coins no phrases and keeps no priests and professors to prove how patriotic are his aims. And, like most dictators, the chief, who can have no other culture than the slave, is only pre-eminent in the art of speech.

Each would like to become a chief for the same reasons as obtain among white men: he gets his beer for nothing, and after the hunt, the best piece of meat from the breast, the skin of a leopard, and, above all, an elephant tusk: moreover, when he goes travelling, an empty hut stands ready for him somewhere. But even here at the lowest stage of class conflicts, the curse of possession is seen, for the rich man—that is, the king—cannot enjoy all that is his and restlessly seeks to cheat death by bequeathing power. Since they are only polygamous out of greed, for wives mean labour, and since, heedless of Malthus, they beget as many children as happen to come, the great ones welcome fratricidal wars among their heirs, which kill off whole families, and tribes make war upon each other so that a few hundred head of cattle shall move from one village to the next. Thus, in the history of the Niam-Niam, who are cannibals, there figures one man who had one hundred and twenty-one grandsons,

and another is recorded "with six brothers who were murdered by the Gambari."

In such anarchy, which is only mitigated by slavery, the herdsman can hold his own better than the husbandman, who does not know if he will reap what he has sown. Thus the conservative tendencies of an agricultural people are checked, and the more communistic feelings of the nomad govern the crowd. Even when they live without rights or property in a kind of slavery, they nevertheless unite as a mass, pasture and hunting belong to all, and when the population of entire villages, every few years, seek the new, still virgin land which lies beyond these boundless steppes, there arises outside of and below the autocracy of a king a herd-community which might be compared with that of Czarist Russia.

The cannibals stand highest in the scale of culture: this remarkable fact is confirmed by all explorers here as on the Congo and among the Caribbees. The Niam-Niam, southwest of the Ghazal, have very big, wide-set, deeply-shadowed eyes, classic noses, and small mouths with broad lips in a round face. These tribes, which their neighbours call the "great eaters," are hunters, eat no domestic animal but like the flesh of game, which each man cooks alone at his own fire, like a gourmet preparing his own pleasure. They are the best porters far and wide, they are most carefully painted with flower and star signs, which they renew every other day in red-brown colour, they have the oldest institutions, show the greatest interest in Europe, are frank in social intercourse, show great dignity, while their hospitality is famous. The king receives the stranger in his dead father's house, lays a bundle of lances at his feet as a greeting from the dead man, then invites him to a feast and never kills him. They punish theft severely, honour the mother of many children, punish a wife's adultery by cutting off her finger tips, and seduction

by cutting off three of the man's finger joints. In every respect the customs of the cannibals are refined, and they cannot understand why they should not eat a man condemned by the oracle or a conquered enemy, or why they should not offer their guest a boiled foot garnished with lugina, a kind of pudding.

"The Nang," so the West African Fergum, a tribe of cannibals, declared to an English explorer, "the Nang is everywhere, in us and you, it is the spirit of the invisible. But after death, it passes into one of our animals, never into a man. Therefore we never kill a cow. But when we eat a man, we need have no fear of devouring our own Nang."

And why should they be regarded as specially cruel, since their customs show so much tact and dignity? Is it not more natural to eat an enemy than to eat a pig or a fowl we have fed for years? And does not this, or some similar scene, live on in the wish-fulfilment dreams of hate-ridden Christians, whom only custom hinders from eating the man whose tortures again provide them to-day with passionate enjoyment?

XIV

The customs of the Nile negroes, practically uninfluenced by the white men and the Abyssinians, lead us into the virgin forest of human feeling: their contradictions are no more to be eliminated by explanation than those in the character of an individual. Undraped by the moral mantle of the white men, the contrasts stand out boldly.

If an old woman is suspected of evil-doing, they tear her gall-bladder from her living body, for these negroes, living far from the rest of mankind, place the seat of sorcery there just as Homer did, who was remote from them by a thousand

miles and years. But the same men do not slaughter their cattle, which they reverence, and when a cow dies and is cooked, among the Dinka the owner goes weeping aside, and does not partake. They celebrate orgies after a victory, but they care for the captured. Many leave their wives full liberty in love, but not in labour. They get a beating if the flour is badly ground, but not for their lovers; others, like the Bongo, who take no more than three wives, are faithful to them: among the Madi, a man must marry the girl who is with child by him; on the other hand, among the Banjoro, the wife can easily make up for adultery with a jug of beer: other tribes punish adultery by a fine equal to the value of the woman (a custom which cannot be too highly recommended to the white men). Even here they are superior in tact to the white races in that the women of chiefs and notables, who in Europe can do what they like, are, even among the tolerant tribes, forbidden the least sexual licence.

The Shilluk make a woman confess, after the birth of her first child, with whom she has associated beside her husband: each of these lovers must atone by giving the husband an ox: a new solution of the question of sexual honour. But if they were many, and she is brave, she throws a handful of sand into the air, crying "There were so many!" Then, quite logically, not her husband, but her mother has to suffer for bringing her up so badly.

A few tribes kill old women, in whom they see the witch: others carry their reverence so far that the mother of the victorious hunter, at the feast after a great hunt, dances alone, naked, in the midst of them, while all cry "See the body which bore the great hunter." The same human beings who, before a war, set a child to roast, and decide, according to whether it lives or dies, whether the war shall go on, nurse their children well, and build them a kind of cradle, and

what white father has ever carried his adult son home for sixteen hours on end, as a traveller saw among the Dinka? When the rainmaker, a mixture of magician and leader, does not allow the Nile to rise in time of drought, they kill this fellow-tribesman with the righteous feeling that he has taken unto himself power over the elements and hence gets more fowls and more corn than the others. But if they honour a white man, like Baker, they throw the glass beads he gave them as a parting gift into the lake to placate the hippos which might otherwise capsize his canoe, and their brothers on Lake Tanganyika, because they loved Livingstone, dried his body, treated it with salt, and carried it for nine months through the wilderness because they felt it should be given to the white men on the coast.

Livingstone, it is true, never told them of the Redemption, but only of the great Father who makes brothers of us all. Instead of teaching them strange legends, he showed them his watch and his compass. "The negro is not impressed by guns and machines," he said, "but by continued kindness and benevolence, and even this applies to only a few." He rarely punished, suggested to them no new needs, and only made them Christians by making himself beloved. His mission of love bears nothing of the curse of so many missions which, often unconsciously, are really emissaries of gold and power. Why are all who really know the negro sceptical about the missionaries? Men without books and pictures, tribes whose holy relics are preserved only within the brown brows of their old men, must at a stroke learn to believe in some white god, so that cotton shares and the balance sheets of cotton firms may go up. Equally free from fanaticism and the business instinct, Livingstone took the negroes as children, and since faith, here as everywhere, develops out of superstition, he used superstition as his starting-point instead of eradicating it.

Has any white scholar actually discovered more about the ape than the southern tribes on the Upper Nile which condemn to death any man who kills a chimpanzee, which once belonged to the human race? Many tribes so reverence snakes that they do not dare to kill them, even when they come into their huts, but drive them out, and most tribes are forbidden to kill the totem animal of their clan, even when it is a lion or a leopard.

Among the Bari, it is believed that many of the dead turn into leopards; among others, no one may shoot certain hyenas at night, because by day they live in their huts as men. These tribes, like most savages, dread evil spirits which bring sickness, death, storm, and drought, but know no good ones. They have no idols, as in West Africa, but sometimes carve household gods in wood. Loma, the Greek tyche, means good and bad luck, fate, whether self-created or imposed. "Loma made him sick," or if a hunter returns empty-handed, "he had no loma."

The savage, more exposed to sickness and the elements, needs a magician to whom he attributes omnipotence because, in his turn, he wants to demand everything from him. The relationship is quite European: the rainmaker rules as dictator, now guiding, now terrifying the chief: he threatens hunger, drought, war in order to extort more taxes, entertains the people with dancing and beer, ceremonially sprinkles certain magic stones with blood, and his only overwhelming distinction lies in his oratory. In the company of other rainmakers, he even tells the truth. "I never think of making rain," said one of them to Baker "until they have given me corn, goats, fowls, and merissa. They have threatened to kill me? Not another drop of rain shall fall in Obbo. I will make their corn wither and smite their cattle with plague." Thus the black dictator talks himself into a power in which he does not believe. But the negroes, like many white tribes, honour even the leader they have finished with: the Madi at any rate,

when they burn their rainmakers, collect the fat dripping from the body to heal their wounds.

How near we are to their world of feeling! But the meeting with the whites dazzles the negro as if he had entered a brilliantly lit hall, while in the negro the white man meets the sun. It is this, rather than the lust of power, which has drawn white men who have lived many years in Africa back to it again as to a paradise which they cannot regain as a whole, but in which they can breathe the freshness of the breath of nature, ever renewed. The hardships and sicknesses of Africa shorten the life of the white man, but the contact with its natural forces strengthens his soul. Even the poet and the scholar, whose days are spent among immortal things, find it harder to flee the confused din of the daily tomtoms of Europe and America than the explorer, hunter, or planter, and this purifying influence does not only come from the daily danger, from the battle with the elements, but rather from the negro's eyes, from the winged or plastic gestures of his hands, which are paler within, like a sign of greater depth of soul, from his childlike, inquisitive ways, from his dignity and realism, from his untragic being.

If the negroes are to be compared with children, then, on the Nile at any rate, they must be compared with happy children, whose cynical innocence lives on in their cruelty. They may kill each other in anger, but they know nothing of the perversions of the white man; everything that darkens white life, hatred and contempt, ambition and jealousy, above all the curse of gold, is absent from the daily life of the negro as a spur to crime, and appears only in the relations of chiefs of different tribes. Even here, as among the whites, the feeling of hatred and revenge is invented by greedy chiefs with respect to other tribes, so that their subjects may be brought to slaughter each other in war.

What the white man brought the negro was at one time no more than the string of beads with which he cheated him out of his ivory. He took only one thing from him, his delight in his own handiwork, for, confronted with the white man's marvels, the instinct of imitation died. Why, with endless labour, make a sharp blade for a knife, when a splendid knife could be had from the white man for a lump of rubber? The Egyptians treated the negroes they reached on the Upper Nile just as the Church treated the people: they did not even teach them to use the potter's wheel, so that the art of the armourer decayed on the Nile and withdrew into inaccessible swamps and distances. The white man can teach the negro the so-called blessings of labour only by seducing him with unknown pleasures, by decoying him with the gifts of civilization, because without their cheap labour he can make no money here, and so he expels them from their paradise of idleness.

He can the more easily do so because part of the men are already in a condition of slavery: not all the work is done by the women, part is done by prisoners of war and the poor, the social organization being varied and not clear. Expensive pleasures are few, the rivalry of the whites for costly clothing, houses or food is almost unknown, for no one wishes to seem what he is not, hence the great class-differences of the whites vanish. Rich or poor, the negro gains and loses by his contact with the whites: first he loses the freedom of idleness and gains sewing-machines, lamps, and whisky: then, having lost his right to vegetate, he gains self-consciousness; once awakened, he seeks to make himself independent in state and constitution, and in the end strives for a different kind of freedom, the phantom freedom of the whites. To-day no white power need enslave the negro: he has himself become the slave of civilization.



[By permission of the R.A.F.]

THE VALLEY OF BAHR-EL-JEBEL FROM THE AIR



(Egyptian Ministry of Public Works

PAPYRUS PLANTS

XV

Their bodies tell whether they are herdsmen or husbandmen. Beside a young Shilluk, nearly every white man looks clumsy and dull. With the naïvely seductive beauty of the Greek adolescent, he sits there slender-legged, still, proud, and naked, with nothing but a skin over his shoulders, his hands held nobly, a bronze Dionysos. They are immediately conscious of their beauty, and everywhere in Central Africa it is the well-made peoples which go naked, like the handsome herdsman tribes of Uganda even to-day, while the smaller, squatter agriculturist, even when he is poor, wraps himself up.

The natural grace of the shepherd, ennobled throughout the world by patience and leisure, is enhanced in these Nilotic tribes not only by their nakedness, but by the curiosity with which they follow the appearance of the white man. They do not disfigure themselves with mouth-sticks and nose-rings, many of them have not even the branded signs of class: their childish mind is satisfied with hair and headdress. It takes months for the Lattuka—the handsomest man on the Nile—to weave the elaborate network of his natural helmet with horse hair, thread and bark, and when he has bound it along the thick lower edge with copper plaques, and added shells and ostrich feathers, he may well display his dazzling teeth when the stranger gazes at him amazed.

Or one of the chiefs sits smoking: first he takes up his pose, leans his right elbow on the arm of his chair, crosses his legs, grasps the pipe with his left hand, takes a deep breath of smoke, returns the pipe to the slave with a proud gesture, and only then puffs out the smoke slowly between his teeth.

But they need not be kings, they may be mere shepherds, possessed of nothing but their strength, and still they offer pictures such as only Africa has to show. A group of young Dinka, graceful as antelopes, with a shoulder-skin for their sole covering, with the lithe strength of the cheetah, they have killed, stand shoulder to shoulder in a row, hardly moving, and when the younger gives the elder a cigarette—no one knows where he has stolen it—the latter, with the languid ease of Egyptian kings on frescoes, stretches out his hand for the much-desired magic weed. Another, with a reddish skin cast about him like a Greek chlamys, stands behind, leaning on a nine-foot staff, silent and waiting, all three motionless and at rest within themselves: a noble existence, raising their hands, not in work, but only in their fine, virile handclasp or in hunting, when they are threatened or hungry.

Since they do not know shame, they always expose their bodies, and are as vain of them as the white man of his clothes, but their object is by no means to be as white as possible. Their dark-brown ground-tone deepens to darkest black or pales to light iron-grey: there are colours like chocolate, coffee, light havanna, brown-yellow leather, and only the tribes which anoint themselves with ashes and iron oxide falsify their colour. As a long skull is regarded as beauty, the princes press and bandage their children's heads to make them fine and long. The ugly branded signs are tribal designs, forming a kind of badge, but they are also proofs of courage, like the scars on the faces of German students, and the women are proud of lines which are branded in a specially painful way as tokens of love. When the negroes wear necklaces of animal teeth, they have at least killed the animals themselves, and the white man, buying their bracelets and spearheads, cuts a shamefaced or comic figure beside them.

Even as hunters they are superior to the white man in

skill, courage, and dignity. As they seldom possess fire-arms, they must grapple, hand to hand, for life or death, not only with the leopard and the lion, but even with the three primeval animals, and thus restore hunting, which the white man has degraded to the safety of sport, to its prehistoric element. With his pitfalls, the negro reduces even the rhinoceros to helplessness, but to give it its quietus, he has to attack it with his spear from a tree, or direct with his sword. He can, it is true, scare away the hippopotamus with fire and noise, but if it has to be caught, the negroes here fight at close quarters with the harpoon, and often even with arrows. The crocodile, which they fear and hate more than even the biggest animals because it drags man and beast into the river, succumbs to their harpoons and a system of ropes, just as in ancient Egypt, but the death-stroke in the back, generally delivered with the lance from a boat, is again a test of tameless courage. After such communal hunts, they fall themselves like animals on the dead foe, cut pieces out of it, and, rending them raw with their teeth, seem to wreak vengeance on it anew.

Most tribes hunt the elephant less eagerly: often they burn down whole forests, and the females and tuskless young perish too. As the elephant practically never attacks, and as, in these latitudes, there is little cultivated land which he can destroy, as in Uganda, he is not hunted out of hate or revenge, but out of greed for ivory, at the command of the chief, to supply luxuries for the white man. The struggle with wild animals is a constant menace, hence they have concentrated all their skill on their weapons: for their five-foot bows, they have invented arrows with cunning barbs on their iron points, have sharpened spear-heads for their long spears, and have discovered the sap of a euphorbia with which to poison the heads.

In all tribes, the women are inferior to the men in looks,

behaviour, and intelligence. As love is nowhere an art, but a woman everywhere a unit of labour, neither sex sees any reason to indulge in taste or fashions, and the disfiguring sticks and braids which they stick into their lips are practically only seen among the women. Moreover, a white woman, who plucks out her eyebrows and eyelashes, has little cause to laugh at the dotted lines tattooed on the face, the iron hoops hanging from the ears of her darker sisters. Love itself is in so far a more moral affair than among the whites as no girl marries a man for his riches, but each one chooses the man she likes. When her breasts are as big as her fists, the Luri girl is left alone in a special tent with the man of her choice, and when the child comes, he must buy her. If they see each other for the first time at the marriage feast, among the Bari the mother follows them into the hut while the feast is going on, asks whether he is pleased with her, and then rejoins the company with screams of joy.

In modesty they are superior to the white women: while the latter discard more and more of their clothing as they grow older, among most of the tribes on the Upper Nile, only the girls go naked; among the Bari, the women wear an apron after the first child, some wear a tail of beads behind, others bind on daily a kirtle of fresh leaves, the prettiest of all fashions. The Jur women are even called "tailed" by the Arabs, because they wear on their kirtles a tail of fine leather strips. If the woman is barren, she can be given back and her price reclaimed, but in many tribes, the wife can withdraw if the man is at fault.

As the woman represents a capital bringing in interest in work, whose fruits can be sold, the negro on the Nile thinks of her much as a white man thinks of a share. If he can acquire one hundred cows by marrying off ten daughters of the same woman, he can have these one hundred cows herded by other

children. Hence the Bari welcome a daughter more than a son, but regard twins as a bad sign and a reason for giving back the woman.

XVI

In the swamps dwell the giants, not farther from the dwarfs than Newcastle from London. Beginning on the left bank of the Nile on the southern Ghazal, they spread on the right bank to about the twelfth degree: but the meaning of their life lies in the swamps. For while the dwarfs on the Ruwenzori shrank more and more in the thousands of years of their life in the undergrowth, the Dinka, the aborigines of these lands, probably the tallest people on earth, grew ever taller, because they had to spend their lives standing like storks on the lagoons and landspits of the swamps. While the pigmies dwindled to 4 ft. 8 ins., the giants grew to 6 ft. 8 ins.: a Dinka of 6 ft. 4 ins. is merely of medium height. This height, further their flat feet and their lengthened heel and neck, show how animals and men approximate in similar circumstances. The Homeric battle of the pigmies with the cranes finds here its symbol, and perhaps its legendary prototype.

When they stand motionless in the swamp, literally for hours on end, on one skinny leg, the other foot supported either in the knee-crook of the standing leg or against its shin, without net or fishing-rod, far from their herds, generally leaning on a long staff, yet by no means asleep, but on the watch and merely still, without passion or thoughts, without aim and apparently without feelings, visible for miles in their endless watery plain, they offer the legendary contrast to those dwarfs who, on the slopes of their volcano, live in the undergrowth their clever, dark, invisible ant-life, always busy, wary and watchful. A spare body, which looks from

behind as if it had been planed down, a slender waist, an elongated skull with a long arched nose, thin lips, fine wrists and ankles, make them, as they stand there on one leg in their wonted posture, like the long marabouts, cranes, and storks, just as the pigmies seem to shrink into moles.

Their thinness, which makes them look even taller, is in so far the result of their absolutely unparalleled laziness, as they will often rather eat grass soup than take the trouble to fish. The laziest of all, the Nuer, do not even bury their dead. The whites, striving to overcome natural predispositions of this kind under moral pretexts, because they need the working power of these millions of men, stake their hopes on the flies, who have decimated their herds and may force them to till the soil. And, indeed, fertile stretches of infinite extent could be turned into arable land here, if "the negro would learn to know the value of work." But as the demand for labour is decreasing throughout the world, the Dinka may with luck outlive the period of forced labour in the white world and preserve to themselves the state of paradise out of which their brothers were so recently startled after thousands of years.

Most of the Dinka tribes are herdsmen and cattle-breeders, the poorest have four cows, the rich up to a thousand: herds of three thousand have been seen. Therefore they have declared their possessions holy, just like the white man, only that their calves are not of gold. In the morning, the leader of the herd is driven forth with a prayer; at festivals, it is wreathed with flowers: the fine, light-grey, short-horned animal, with its big hump, is sprinkled at milking time to keep off the flies: at night it is guarded against the lions in folds of thorn or euphorbia. The cowherd sleeps beside his favourite ox: once a month the cattle are bled with the spear. This passion for cattle was exploited by cunning slave-dealers,

who bartered cows for men, and cattle-stealing is the cause of all wars and hostile enterprises. Their imagination and legends are peopled with cattle: and they believe in sacred kine which the Nile spirit guards, only letting them pasture at night, bound to stakes, when the mist veils the banks.

If drought comes, although drought is only a relative term here, and their miraculous plains are eaten down, they transfer the cattle with great ceremony from the right bank of the Nile to the left. Then the women and children stay behind in their light, swiftly wattled nomadic huts of elephant grass, while the men cross the river in a few hollowed tree-trunks. They drag a few calves into the water with ropes, the lowing of the frightened animals attracts the mothers, who follow them half-swimming, and finally the bulls follow the vanishing cows. The sheep are carried over the Nile in boats, the dogs swimming alongside heedless of danger. Thus the live-stock is ferried across the Nile by families in two days, and the medicine man, smeared with ashes, stands on the bank and exorcizes the crocodiles, who snatch their booty all the same.

On the Ghazal, some of these tribes are neighbours of their cousins, the Niam-Niam, and thus vegetarians and cannibals observe and despise each other, the more so as the vegetarians do not only live on milk and millet, and the cannibals not only on men: the hate between half-enemies is always deeper than between opposites. They jeer at each other for “gluttons” and “stick-men” because the Dinka seldom appear without long staffs. When the Dinka, the blackest men of Central Africa, with their filed teeth and ugly, red-dyed shocks of hair, with their headdress and plume, stand beside the cannibals, with their more refined forms of civilization, the moral scale of the whites turns to ridicule.

But if the cannibals look down on the “savage Dinka,”

because they worship cattle, dislike hunting, and have no etiquette, the Dinka in his turn looks down on another neighbour, the "savage Jur," who has to forge his iron. As they are dependent on the Nile and its shifting swamps, as well as on the deposits of iron, the Jur change their habitat and cross the river in spring. Then the wilderness begins to live. They stack charcoal and crumbled ore in layers in their little, skilfully simple kilns, and although this black smith has only a stone for an anvil, a square lump of iron for a hammer, to which his own arm serves as shaft, and a split stick for tongs, he can, by stout hammering, make his iron hard.

Meanwhile the women are busy with eel-pots and fish-baskets, gourds and pottery, and the naked gipsy camp in the forest is only broken when they have collected enough iron to make arrow-heads, lances, and ankle rings for the Dinka.

Thus the black tribes on the Nile strive to heighten their self-respect by despising or envying each other, just as if they were Europeans.

XVII

Where the swamp-lands end, towards 10° N. lat., is a flat lagoon, just like the others, only that its end cannot be seen. This is Lake No; here a new epoch begins for the Nile. Here the river, on 30° E. long., touches the most westerly point of its course (only the third cataract lies so far to the west), here it regains a firm bed, which it keeps to the end; in and near the lake it receives three great tributaries which affect its volume. The course of the river through the lake is visible, for it deflects sharply to the east, and flows in that direction for seventy-five miles, only resuming its allotted north-south

course at Malakal. It is as though the mighty river had to strike athwart its wonted course in order to take up three ministering streams which come to swell its power.

As the river alters its direction and its character, the landscape slowly alters too. Now the banks grow clearer and broader, because they grow dryer, the river again reaches a width of a hundred yards and more, the papyrus decreases, acacias spread their parasols, little round huts are grouped in villages, grey cattle, surrounded by little dogs, come to the water: motionless, the tall Dinka sit smoking round a fire, watching their women wading knee-deep in the Nile, filling their blue pots with yellowish water, then, on the bank, heaving them on to their heads and carrying them deftly to the village. When a Dinka stands solitary on one leg, he looks like the wading-birds standing close by on another bit of mud.

In this landscape, the Bahr-el-Ghazal falls into the Bahr-el-Jebel at the western end of Lake No, the Gazelle River into the Mountain Nile. Though the Ghazal is a servant of the Nile, it is itself a giant, with a basin stretching over ten degrees of latitude and nine degrees of longitude, and hence greater than the basin of the equatorial lakes, which beget the Nile. Here, as in human history, the mind revolts against the thought that the tributary should be stronger than he who receives the tribute. If the stronger is only a tributary because it discharges into the other, yet ultimately it is a question of greater vitality which decides as to who is the conqueror. The Ghazal has mighty adventures behind it, dramatic transformations and wanderings, by the time it nears the Nile, and is richer in water and in battles than any river of Europe. Even its own tributaries have lived the life of great rivers. Where they fell into it, the Ghazal River had seen broad savannahs with gigantic trees, and later the

tropical forest, stretching up to the Congo watershed. And then, on its lower course, it was faced with the struggle of water against land, just like the Nile.

But now it was clear who was the stronger: when it lost its bed, its direction and its self-control, when plant-bars and grass islands, lagoons, backwaters, and channels confused it, when the anarchy of the swamps set upon it, the Ghazal lost nearly half as much water again as the equally afflicted Nile, and thus the mighty stream, dispersed, discharged only through a kind of navigation channel, while the stronger character, triumphant over trials, received it with moral composure, ready to direct and to use it.

Even the life of the second of these tributaries, the Bahr-el-Zeraf, which falls into the Nile on the same latitude to the east of Lake No, has known adventure. It begins "somewhere in the swamp below the Awai," said the geographers, just as they might say of a foundling child. Its windings in the lagoon country, which lead to the conclusion that it arose from former swamps, its banks, if such can be spoken of, which seem to be formed of the root masses of earlier vegetation, and the jellyfish-like elusiveness of its course, make it look, seen from the aeroplane, like a frightful malignant disease eating into the flesh of the land.

The most interesting of the three, which falls into the Nile close below the Zeraf, at the point where the Nile again turns northwards, is the Sobat, for it is the first to carry down the strength of Abyssinia in the form of silt to the Nile, and hence to decide its future destiny. Dominating a gigantic basin, and originating only by parts of one of its tributaries from the plateau of the great lakes, the Sobat brings nearly everything it contains from the Abyssinian alps, from those south-western mountains which the few men who have penetrated so far have praised for their beauty. This river, and

all the others which later flow into the Nile from these mountains, have, given the relative altitude, a long mountain and a short valley region to flow through, the opposite of all the rivers which come from the great lakes. Thus, impetuous and stormy, the river forges a virile course for itself, and conquers the seductions of its later life with the strength of its youth.

Although it thus stands the test of the swamps better than the Ghazal, which came from the west and was nearly lost, the Sobat must nevertheless forfeit a good deal of its water in the swamps which attack its tributaries. Since, even towards the end of its course, its banks remain somewhat higher than the surrounding country, the water which has overflowed in the rainy season cannot fall back into the Sobat, and thus remains lying on the land all the year round, unless the negroes drain it for fishing. In spite of all these obstacles, and although the nature of the country forces it into swamps, this mountain stream is strong enough to deliver on an average 14 per cent of all the water which the Nile carries down to Khartoum.

At the point where the river, after the last of these three confluences, turns northward, it receives at Malakal its fourth name: the Victoria and Albert Niles became in their turn the Bahr-el-Jebel and the Upper Nile, but now as the Bahr-el-Abiad, it flows without tributaries straight to the north, until its most astonishing encounter will once more simplify its name.

XVIII

Now the tropics are conquered, the adventures of youth overcome, a river flows in manly gravity towards its fate.

Now it has time to recall all the surprises which befell it, lakes, waterfalls, and rapids, the manifold dangers of the

swamps, the struggle with the lagoons. Even here the Nile is not deep, generally fifteen feet, at times only six, so that even the flat-bottomed steamers often run over sand: but it spreads out like a lake; at times, with an incline of a twelfth of an inch to the mile, it seems to stand still. The vast plain, in which it now moves sluggishly northward, without obstacles or menaces, for seven hundred and fifty miles, stretches from the foot of the lake plateau to Khartoum, and is connected in the east with the slope of the Abyssinian mountains, in the west with the mountains of Nubia and the hills of Kordofan. Low undulations on either side of the river are enough to protect the land from floods and swamps, and to hold the stream, from now on, within firm banks, to keep it navigable. As far as this point, the Nile was known to certain peoples of antiquity coming upstream.

The landscape which conditions and permits all this is the bush: the Nile here receives a premonition of the desert.

The key-note of this broad land is the acacia, in vague colours, brown, green, silver-grey, sand-colour, red-purple. Before this belt lies a corn-yellow, dry strip; close by the banks is a dark green border of grasses, generally um-soof, more rarely papyrus, and still nearer the water generally a strip of black mud. Sometimes, however, the bright light bush looks black, generally in March, when the acacias stand out like skeletons from the burnt land. The custom of firing the steppe is common to all the peoples on the Nile who do not live in the daily rain near the equator. It is ineradicable, and, although whole forests in this gigantic region are endangered, comprehensible. Otherwise the steppe-grass would grow too thick and too high, and its juicy tips would be out of reach of the cattle.

Only a kind of winter sleep seems to hold the steppe in check, it only half dries up, but at high water is flooded over

a width of nearly three miles. As far as Kosti, some rain falls all the year round. But the farther it spreads north the greater the difficulty which the bush finds in surviving the dry season: then the animals take flight, and the boundaries of the game are shifted.

Islands of gentle hills approach the river at all points, but the plain lies so flat that a difference of height of six feet determined the situation of the capitals of administration. In the next four hundred miles the river falls only thirty-six feet.

Towards Renk, on the twelfth degree N. lat. more trees approach the river, and new varieties. The baobab, the pachyderm of the bush plants, broader than it is high, a demagogue of impressive appearance, but nearly hollow, yields from the greenish skin of its thick, empty fruits an insipid lemonade.

In this region, and upstream to about Tonga, thousands of huts stand in a dense row. Here live the Shilluk, who seem, only some two centuries ago, to have been forced to the north from the Ghazal swamps: later whole tribes emigrated from this relatively small, fertile region on account of over-population, and settled as far as Lake Albert under all kinds of names. Thus the half-nomad pastoral peoples of the Nile lands are cast hither and thither by flood and drought in the eternal battle of the river with the land.

This noble stock, resembling the Egyptian type as seen in the royal tombs, with an aquiline nose separated from the forehead by a deeper bridge than in any other negro people, with fine teeth and small feet, with slow movements and gestures like the Dinka, disfigure themselves by rubbing dung and ashes into their bodies and hair, and then stand covered with artificial red and grey, like their greyhounds. But their huts and utensils are skilfully made, and they make

as much of the acacia, of which there are eleven varieties in the Soudan, as their brothers on the equator of the banana: boats and water-wheels, firewood, tanning material, gum, and fodder for livestock.

Now the animal of the steppe and the desert, the camel, comes for the first time to the Nile to drink. And with him, on these latitudes, instead of the negro a new kind of man, too, comes to the river, a man who will subdue it with more power than ever the negro could foresee. The round huts grow rarer: square ones succeed them, but soon the first whitewashed houses are mirrored in the river, the bronze or painted naked figures vanish, women in gaudy garments wash their clothes in the Nile, the Virgin rides blue-veiled along the river on an ass, with Jacob and Abraham at her side, a white tent stands in the glowing sunshine, a man, no lighter in the face than the last negroes, but muffled up in a white burnouse, appears, and beside him a youth leads a splendid black horse with white feet.

Africa, the real savage Africa, where the Nile passed its childhood and youth, disappears. Arabia has dawned on the horizon, a hundredfold mingled and deflected by Nubia, and yet, with its thousand years of presence in this land, stronger than all the races whose civilizations preceded or followed it. The hippopotamus still rises from the river, but it grows rarer. Where asses, horses, and camels come to the water, where triangular sails spread over it, the spirit of neighbouring Asia advances to the Nile.

The river broadens and broadens, more and more white sails flash on it, casks and chests stand in heaps at the stations, thousands of sacks of cotton wait for the steamer, a flashing buoy betrays the conqueror, and suddenly, below a slight bend, a great railway bridge spans the river, the first bridge and railway since the birth of the Nile, two thousand river-

miles away, on the equator. Corrugated iron houses and stone sheds, whistles, sharp words of command, and policemen, the rattling of lorries, the smell of oil, and the sweat of labouring men, a movement recalling the Mediterranean ports, everything in Kosti proclaims the advent of the new colonial empire, only that instead of a church spire, a little downstream, there rises the slender column of the first minaret.

And here, from Kosti on, lies a new paradise for the birds.

This is the second on the Nile, exactly in the middle of its course, while the two others lie at source and mouth. Here guests are more frequent among the natives than at either of the other points; for here, between Kosti and Khartoum, the migrant birds from the north have their winter sojourn. In floods of black and white plumage, they pour in millions over earth and water. As these countless hordes rustle and scream, flutter and swoop, mutely eloquent even as they settle on the green and yellow dunes, in the islands and embankments, in the creeks and bays of the swelling river, these smaller creatures draw eyes and ears away from the bigger animals, just as a large string orchestra can outshine the loud brass.

These guests from the north are no famished refugees: if merely cold and hunger drove them forth, they could find warmth and food nearer, and would not quit lands which are warm. Why else should the Egyptian swallow, which builds its nest in January, stay where it is, while the northern swallow flies farther and farther, up to the equator. A few species of duck from Lower Egypt migrate to Lake Victoria, flying through a sixth part of the earth, the pelicans leave Egypt, some species, such as the corn-crake, even run the whole way from the north, flying only when the sea compels them. What urges them all to leave their birch and pine woods for the acacias and bananas? Why do all migrate and none

breed? Rest and food is their aim, but love and marriage are for the north, though they see others like them mating, breeding, and feeding their young.

Thus, by the thousand, they go staying with relations, but their hosts are as suspicious as human ones. The shrike with its quivering tuft, the honey-bird with its metallic plumage flashing like jewels, the oriole and the goatsucker seldom find their brothers on the Nile disposed to mix, fly or play with them: they do not fight, but they keep themselves to themselves, the correct attitude towards uninvited cousins, and the water-hawk, visiting his brother the red-necked hawk of the Nile, is probably amazed at his smallness. Before the countless hordes of European storks, gulls, and tern, the native storks, gulls, and tern beat a prudent retreat to the south. Even the crested crane is by no means overcome with delight when, in autumn, there dawns on the horizon the army of grey and maiden cranes who, under pretext of moulting, devour fantastic quantities of corn. For that reason the peasant prefers the kestrel, who perhaps nested on Notre Dame, for he is sensible and eats the locusts.

The life of these myriads of birds on the middle course of the Nile, free, or almost free of struggle, the distribution of these races, all different in size and strength, over a relatively small area, reveals a state of paradise which only the animal has kept, which the black man has half lost, and the white man lost for ever. The apostles of the heroism of war, always prone to take their stand on "nature red in tooth and claw," forget that man is the only animal to fight his brothers on the grand scale, but here they might see native and invading peoples, distributed in tribes, vegetating in harmonious freedom side by side.

The comic turn is provided by the pelicans: they fish, hunt, eat, digest, and sleep in common: at first sight they look like



[*Sudan Guide Book, London*

THE HUNTERS SET OUT



!Lehnert & Landrock

BEAUTY

roughly piled walls of yellow-pink stone, as they sit with indrawn neck on low trees and bushes, half-asleep and motionless. Then, as they advance to the water, waddling along like stout old professors, now philosophically reflective, now screaming in argument, their huge, flesh-coloured feet rising and falling heavily, yet not clumsily, they gobble up whole armies of Nile fish, collecting them in the great pouches under their beaks, just as children bring home berries in their pockets.

As still as bronze statues, the stilt-birds stand with dignity on their long legs in the middle of the river on the bright sand of the islands or in the grass on the banks. Suddenly, a movement ripples through the rows, as if they had been awakened by a signal we cannot hear, and they rise in a rustling cloud, form long, slightly curved files, and disappear inland. Gliding mysteriously over the parasol tops of the acacias, over the dry spears of the rushes, they return from the fields as they flew away, wheel in flocks over their resting-place, and alight in groups to stand again on the islands and the banks, tall, distinguished, as still as bronze statues.

The great cranes arrive from the north with their light-grey plumage, with the fine arch of their backs sinking to the dark tail-feathers, with their small and proudly borne heads and their firm, energetic beaks, settling and drawing in their wide pinions in leisured movement. The domestic storks stand in groups beside them like town councillors. Black and white, and much less beautiful, yet sovereign in their flight, rows of northern spoonbills, busy with the water, form a white border to the bank, and among them the merry sandpipers and ruffs, rising in swarms, darting hither and thither close above the river, in odd slanting lines, yet never breaking their formation, look as if they came from Prussia. On the stones in front of the strip of sand the dainty wagtails rock, with the dumpy brown Nile geese swimming about

in front of them like old-fashioned governesses in charge of schoolgirls.

The sacred ibises still wheel over their river with their shapely wings, stretching their necks far out, so that the peculiar curve of their beaks stands out against the sky. Water-fowl and duck have their haunts in the rushes by the bank, and swim peacefully about on the strange water in front of their more distinguished relatives standing along the banks. Little duck, big duck, striped duck, teal, northern and native duck are there, and over their heads the lovely swallows stream tirelessly all day long over water and land and rise buoyantly into the turquoise blue sky, where the hawk hangs motionless over some prey until he drops like a stone to seize his quarry. Away over the ghostly pale-grey acacias of the forest, small light-grey hawks dart like silver arrows, for out of the tangled undergrowth of the acacias comes the everlasting cooing of the wild doves.

Snipe and lapwing, with their merry question—peewit, peewit?—run about on the narrow tongues of sand where there is no room for the big birds, but the hoopoe, the hudhud of the Persians, comes flying from the water, swells his fine comb and spreads his tail, showing off in front of the others: a few seconds later, he departs to do his turn somewhere else, like a playwright following his play all over the world, and taking his call.

XIX

Emerging from moorish arches, the new god nears the Nile. The worshipper about to cross the river on his way east kneels, in his white robe and turban, on the green pasture, then washes his feet in the Nile, a solitary figure encamped before the blue and yellow desert landscape and sky, with sharp con-

tours standing out against the pure, transparent air. Quiet groups on the bank, great herds of black and white goats are watched by a few goatherds in fluttering white robes, among pastel-green dunes and hills. Camels stand in hundreds knee-deep in the water, or wait on the banks till those before them leave the watering-place; guarded by their mounted herdsmen, they stand hanging their heavy heads, lingering, without greed, oriental. Beside them the horses of the herdsmen drink the yellow water. It is still the same water, but its guests have changed: horses and camels on the Nile mean that it has entered middle age. All seem at rest here, and the long islands overgrown with bushes which split up the river, stretched out like goddesses at rest, create the impression of a life spent in idyllic breadth and leisure.

Little clumps of papyrus still come downstream like gently floating islands, the last witnesses of the great battle in the swamps, like the last belated prisoners returning after a great war to a world at peace, and unable to find a niche for themselves. They cannot recognize the tortured river they once knew, as it flows through fine, broad dhurra-fields, past neatly heaped pyramids of corn, as its water, now clear, stands out against the pale-green line of the rising cornfields and the bright yellow sand of the steppe.

Every object, tree or house, man or animal, appears separate in the dazzling light, and so seems a symbol, an idea, an image of all trees and houses, of all worshippers and camels only the sailing boats drive swiftly before the wind, and the man at the high helm must keep a sharp lookout for the many and shifting shallows of the Nile. The coolness by the river is out of proportion to the heat of the desert climate, for the hot Arabian wind has been moistened by the magnificent stretch of water.

In this dreaming life of birds and men, this idyll of peace,

everything seems happy save the father of it all, the Nile. Great dread befalls it just at this point, where the world of birds rejoices in its vast expanse. In summer, the Nile feels a check here, yet without knowing whence it comes; its adversary is invisible. The more widely the dammed up waters spread, the more kindly the natives look upon them, for in autumn, when all the water has retreated, they will sow on the freshly fertilized land, and three months later they can reap. The stream is unaware of all this: according to the law of its being, it pours on with might, though the incline is but small, seeking to overpower its enemy. The farther it struggles on, the wider it spreads, the land already seems a lake, though not a swamp. In the distance it sees towers and buildings rise, higher and handsomer, more widely spread than ever it has seen before in its course. A town approaches, yet something else approaches still nearer.

As the opposing pressure increases, as its own forward urge is concentrated on smaller and smaller quantities of water, as towers and buildings grow higher, and men and camels, cargoes and boats increase, a swelling roar comes nearer, louder than it has ever heard. If this is a river, then it is a river like the Nile. A bridge, bigger than either of the others, is cast across it. It has bored seven double piles into the river bed, and trembles slightly when the trains rumble over it. A few waves on, then a huge river dashes to meet it from the right, as broad as itself, yet with a much stronger current, a wild, bold, foaming, dark-coloured river. These are the waters which dammed it up so long.

From under a bridge as long and high as its own, the stranger bursts forth, squeezes the broad White Nile into a narrow channel on its western bank, dashes against an evergreen, rustling island, then, on the level of a wooded

tongue of land, casts its waters with frightful power into the other. But they do not yet mingle: even within the course of the elder, the wilder brother's dark, impetuous current dominates their common flow. This is no tributary, which, like the other three, ends at its mouth: this is a distinct character, a match for the Nile, free and proud, which seems to offer an alliance on equal terms, so that they may, from now on, traverse the world together. It brings gifts with it, memories of the high mountains of its youth, still invisible, but destined one day to become a life-giving element.

Thus, on the palmy beach of Khartoum, the White Nile meets the Blue Nile. Thus they create in a brotherly embrace one of the loveliest spots in the world. Thus they unite their fates, and, by their bond, lay the foundation of the fate of Egypt.

BOOK TWO

THE WILDER BROTHER

I

THE winds began it. If it were not for the monsoons, blowing at their appointed time from their appointed quarter, where would the rain come from? But the rain is the real mother of the Blue Nile, the mountains are its father. In the love-struggle of the elements, the bodily clash of volcanoes and clouds, the miracle of the second Nile is born. If Abyssinia bore no alps, if these alps were not volcanoes, if the winds did not break against them, to send the rain streaming from the sky, there would be no stream on earth to "hurry snakewise to the plain," carrying with it metallic detritus from the mountains to fertilize the desert a thousand miles away.

For that is how the debris of the virgin rock became silt, and the silt became the oasis. Volcanoes and clouds, rain and winds have created Egypt out of a howling wilderness, far away in space and time, and as here the elements have renewed their work for ages year by year at the same season before the eyes of men, this even ebb and flow gave birth to the first knowledge of month and moon, to the first questionings of sun and planets, to the first social order and the first law. Just as the farmer in other lands looks out for the rain, the eyes of this desert people scanned the distance for the watery messenger riding in the bed of their one river, without whom they must perish, even as they do to-day.

The winds began it. Yet where do the winds come from? Even they, like great men, first bear fruit under opposition. In their war-time, when they jostle, and must yield to other winds, they bring the rain. As long as the wintry north wind blows, the north-east monsoon brings the rain from Asia over the Red Sea, and reaches the Abyssinian

highlands nearly dry. But when, in spring, the south-west wind sets out from the South Atlantic, in its flight over Africa it adds to the sea moisture all the damp exhalations of the equatorial jungles, travels heavy laden over the hot Soudan, till it suddenly dashes against the towering alps, and, after a flight of thousands of miles, discharges the vapour of sea and lands on their precipitous walls. Therefore, as the Abyssinian farmer says, the rain comes when the wind blows from the desert, and the Nile engineers say so too, for their calculations on the distant delta are based on these winds.

Thus African winds create the African river where it is to become fruitful, yielding only in autumn to their hostile brothers, the dry north winds sent over by India. And the winds and the mountains affect each other, the height and abruptness of the alps lengthen the rainy season, but the winds themselves have helped to mould their fantastic forms. And as here the rain determines the seasons, it turns them round: on the high plateau of the midlands, six to nine thousand feet up, it creates a dry winter which is never cold because the sun's rays, on the twelfth degree, slant relatively little, but it cools down the heat of summer. Thus temperatures are even, and their greatest yearly range is thirteen degrees.

But this rain, whose effects the Egyptian fellah enjoys every October, and the Abyssinian peasant rather earlier, visits the Abyssinian farmer in terrible guise; thunderstorms, heavier and more frequent than anywhere else on earth, cloud-bursts and hail, appearing and disappearing suddenly, like everything else in this strange land, destroy men, cattle, and huts. Hundreds are killed by lightning every summer, the number of thunderstorms has been reckoned at four hundred a year, and quite recently the Emperor ordered services of intercession to be held because so many men had been struck down by lightning.

Though the rain arrives punctually, setting in, after a gentle beginning, with full force in the middle of June, as we know from Egyptian records which noted the beginning of the flood thousands of years ago, yet it varies greatly in strength and quantity. The mountains, the male element of this union, stand firm, and have probably not changed for the last few million years, but the sea, with its womanly passions, perhaps the jungle, too, with its secrets, these two most unexplored regions of the earth, load the wind with a quantity of moisture so variable that it cannot be calculated. So many peoples and generations of Egypt have studied this vital question through and through, and yet the height of the flood resulting from the rain has never once been successfully forecast for the following year. In close succession—in 1904 and 1908—one flood was twice as high as the other.

In its homeland, the rising Nile does not come in the guise of a liberator, as it does in Egypt, but appears like an angry god. Where it rises, in the region of Lake Tana, there rise with it two great tributaries, many small ones, and the Atbara, which flows northward alone. All these river beds run more or less dry in winter: the tributaries generally silt up, the Atbara always. Thus the peoples of these lands have had to turn nomad, spending the nine months' dry season where vestiges of water lie in the river beds, where men and beasts can find just enough to eat. The little, low-banked rivers which have inundated the country are often bordered with woodland: the big ones, the Blue Nile and the Atbara, whose high banks generally prevent floods properly speaking, are separated from the plain and even from the desert by a narrow strip. Even along the driest brook, the acacia and even the palm grow, and the subterranean waters which so often in Africa proceed from the rivers nourish many springs.

With their camels and goats, with all they possess by way

of women and children, these Arab nomads choose their camping-place in the dry, deep beds of these rivers, especially on the lower reaches where there is, after all, more food to be found than in the desert whence they come. There they knock from the doum palm its dense clusters of fruit with hard kernels which can be ground into a resinous powder and cooked with milk as a cake: with poles, they can shake down the seed-pods of the acacia, which yield a vestige of oil for the cattle, while the camel must be content with the dry thorns. Here they can repair their tents of leaves and the palms supply them with mats and ropes. But the life-giving element is water, which lies here in pools.

In these pools, the crocodiles have forgotten the defection of their element, they half hibernate. A thousand doves and desert grouse drink at the pools where the crocodile sleeps, and even the gazelles, God's fleetest creatures, come punctually an hour before sunrise and after sunset to these most meagre of all drinking-places which the Nile has left behind.

Now danger haunts the springs, for not only men and cattle, but the beasts of prey too are attracted by them, and the Arab leads his cattle away from the water before dark, to leave the way open for the lions and leopards. The only stupid creatures are the baboons, who ought to be the wisest: the remains of dhurra-beer are left out for them, so that at times they have literally got drunk on it, and in that befuddled state have succumbed to craft. They are not half men for nothing.

Suddenly, though the sky is clear blue, there is a rumble of distant thunder. All the thousands of men and women encamped in the river bed rush out, carrying their tents and their household goods with them, to take flight. A confused clamour arises—"El Bahr! The river!" Although these nomads reckon time by the moon and the stars, with their

inertia, with the fatalism of the sons of the desert, they are always taken by surprise when the river dashes down from the highlands in the middle of June. In a few minutes, the rumble has swelled to a roar: that is the sign, dreaded and longed for. While a thousand miles downstream in Egypt, hourly telegrams warn the engineer how far the river has travelled, how high it is and how muddy, there is not even a camel rider to tell the people who live in its bed what will happen the next minute. The thunder is the only harbinger.

El Bahr! A moving wall, the river approaches, fifteen hundred feet wide, pouring downward in brown waves, full of trees, bamboo, and mud, and so it hurries past.

And suddenly, as it came, the river awakens life on the banks. Already the rain is on its heels, and together they call forth buds, from the buds leaves, the buds overnight, the leaves immediately afterwards—they seem to unfold before one’s very eyes. In the raging power of its youth, the Nile creates a green paradise where everything seemed to be thirsting to death. A few days, and round the pools where all the birds crowded for a drop of water to wet their throats, wild geese whirl and mate and build. All the wild animals refresh themselves, wade and drink, and even the crocodile is joyfully startled, and thinks the drought was but a dream.

Even up in the highlands, thousands leave their homes and take refuge in the higher mountains, as men did in the Flood. All traffic is at a standstill in the rainy months, for nobody can cross the raging rivers, and even the poorest peasant going to the next village takes a kind of cape of papyrus with him to cower under when a fresh deluge overtakes him. The horses, who cannot cross the streaming valleys, stand unharnessed in the huts with the people, who pass the rainy months dully, perhaps sociably, but not impatiently. They all know it will not last long.

Only the nomads cannot linger where the gifts of God have enriched them. When the savannah greens, it at once becomes a swamp, a cloud of insects rises, the herds are in danger: even the most constant companion of man, the camel, flounders if its driver does not wait until the morning sun has dried off the surface a little. Men and beasts hurry to higher levels; the Nile creates wanderers. In three months, the greater part of the whole rainfall for the year has come down, and with it the flood. But in September, when the waters begin to abate, and men and beasts come wandering down again, the fat time begins. The whole earth is covered with rustling green, and the corn, which was planted in the soft muddy soil with a stick, ripens in a few weeks.

Permanent inundations such as those higher up on the White Nile are impossible on the steep slopes of the Blue Nile valley. For the rain has cut deep gullies in the volcanic rock, and in these narrow canyons river rapids and torrents have formed which all hurry westwards to the Nile. Thus the whole of the inner highlands looks rugged. Lower down, where the widened river enters the sandstone, it has eaten it down and reached the virgin rock. Here, where it has cut a deep, perpendicular bed for itself, and above, where it washes over volcanic strata, at all points it picks up minerals, which, in its rushing fall, it mixes with soil. Thus the silt is formed, a loose, unbound mass of feldspar, mica, and hornblende crystals, of chalky and ferruginous minerals, never two years the same, different on the Blue Nile and the Atbara, while its variations indicate differing sediments and the varying power of the river.

Man, too, has influenced this elemental downpouring. In prehistoric times, when the land was covered with forest, less water and less silt must have come down from the mountains, and the Blue Nile cannot have flowed into the White

Nile at a time when a Mediterranean gulf is said to have lain where the Egyptian desert now lies. Man certainly began very early to fire the plain, and with it the forest, in order to produce fresh food for his cattle, and by deforesting the land, just as he does to-day in the steep highlands, he opened to the rain and hence to the rivers a free passage to the plain. In their turn, they washed the soil down with them, and now black masses of rock tower into the air, from which wind and water loosen millions of particles to enrich the yearly silt.

Thus Abyssinia, the "roof of East Africa," which lies so high that land up to 5,500 feet is counted as lowland, by a unique combination of circumstances became the fountain-head of a life-giving element which has in its turn created a land without its like. Hephaistos is the father, for no country on earth has so many extinct volcanoes, and as these memorials of primeval time rise in ever new, fantastic forms, as ash-cones and lava-streams, hot springs and sulphur vapours bear witness even to-day to the convulsions of the earth, this land will yield for millions of years to come the primeval substance which, carried away and deposited by the river, is transformed into new land.

Thus the winds, the rain and the mountains of Abyssinia, far away to the north of Egypt, created that wonderful oasis through their messenger, the Nile.

II

Like its graver brother, the Blue Nile rises in a lake, but here there can be no doubt that the river first makes a brief passage through the lake, like a prelude to its song. In the high mountains lies the source of the "Little Abbai," the "Mother of the Abbai," that is, of the Blue Nile.

This mountainous country, lying 11° E., seventy miles south of Lake Tana, gives birth to the river in the Gish valley, at an altitude of 8,000 feet, higher than the sources of most European rivers. A sparse forest of cedar and juniper, of fig and euphorbia is here interrupted by basalt rocks only half covered by the red soil. The high tree-heath does not bear fruit here, as it does on the equator, but it blossoms copiously, and beside it the white and pink balsam stretches out its red twigs. The golden-yellow flowers of the coreopsis and the purple patches of the acanthus lend colour to the grey-green of the mountain forest.

The voices of the birds lend it life with the light. When the goatsucker has rent the night with its strange, hollow cry, the deep tuba tones of the helmet-bird begin before sunrise, the flute-bird tries its oboe, then the little starlings strike up, whistling an accompaniment to the morning song of the swallows, with the regular crotchets of the crickets fiddling the beat. But soon these tender sounds are drowned by the tussle of tropical screeching set up by the guinea-fowls and parrots.

In the middle of a moor, at the top of a steep slope, a palisade of bamboo has been planted round a hole rather more than a yard square. A moderately deep spring of very clear, very cold water, welling up quietly, flowing off without bubbles into a small runnel and then disappearing in an easterly direction behind the mountain forest, is the source of the Blue Nile, and only its volcanic origin can explain its extraordinary situation. Small and cramped, still and clear, compared with the heady, roaring fall in which the other Nile is born, it shows how little the first moments of a living being can foreshadow of its later life. A great and grave character soon issued from the youthful turbulence of that source, while from this still retreat an adventurer arises whose deeds amaze the world.

Yet the Blue Nile, with its first sound and step, revealed itself as the future eccentric. While the White Nile had to flow a thousand miles before it could be acclaimed as a wonder of the world, the Blue Nile, like the Prophet, is venerated even in its cradle. Here, too, the star appeared to a king in the distant east and prophesied to him that, far away in the mountains, a mighty creature had come to birth who should bear power and light over the desert even to the sea-coast. Christians and heathens pray at this source. The thatched hut with its surrounding gallery which stands by this and two other, smaller "Nile sources" is the Abyssinian state church, and the bearded, ignorant man in front of it is its priest.

But the heathens who live almost untouched beside the Christians in these mountains take their shoes from their feet when they approach the rivulet. It flows through long stretches of little-known country, unwatched by present or past. The rain, which first makes the river important in the eyes of men, renders exploration difficult, just as, in the life of a prophet, the first years of withdrawal, a momentous epoch, often elude research.

Volcanic rocks in horizontal strata, bearing in parts traces of recent activity, and covered with vegetation, form a mountain landscape through which many small tributaries hurry to swell the stormy stream, till, having reached a width of about sixty yards, it settles into a flat alluvial plain. Then a great lake opens before it, it has reached the south-west shore of Lake Tana, to leave it again almost immediately.

This grey-green, heart-shaped lake, which the Nile quits like a great artery at its lowest point, lying at the same height of 5,500 feet as the lakes of the Engadine, is flanked at a few points only by mountains of medium height: in general, the shores are flat, with palms and acacias, and poor thatched

huts, the biggest of which, under the junipers, generally belongs to the "Ras," or prince, or is used as a church.

To-day the lake is about as big as Lake Albert: once it was perhaps half as big again, but the rain made it shrink: decomposed lava, carried down for ages by its feeders, silted up the shores with mud, and thus hemmed in the lake. The lava and basalt on the shore, which show its volcanic origin, yield the first mud which the Nile takes up and carries away. Thirty rivers and brooks discharging into the lake are all smaller than the Abbai, and as this is the only outlet, Lake Tana must count as an important source of the Nile, and as such is more important to the Nile engineers than the Little Abbai, for without its inflow the lake would not lose much water: hence this lake may be called the source from a geographical rather than a hydrographical standpoint.

The crocodile has not reached the lake, but when the natives sail on its waters in boats of papyrus and reeds, they are exposed to danger from the hippopotamus which inhabits it. The thrilling hunt for this animal is so profitable that each man scratches his tribal sign on to his harpoon: whoever strikes the animal first gets it, even though its body only reappears above water much later and far away. Thus the Caledonian boar was hunted by the Homeric heroes, and a tribal sign such as this on Lake Tana would soon have settled the gracious dispute about Atalanta.

When the Abbai has flowed through the lake, visible and unmingled, for eight miles to the south—a stretch about as short as the course of the White Nile through Lake Albert—at the peninsula of Giorgia there lies a wide, deep bay: here the Blue Nile begins its real course. In the fields the coffee with its red berries still grows half wild, for Abyssinia is its home, and from here it migrated to Arabia. Red pepper grows near it, on long reaches the papyrus persists even

through the dry season, and masses of yellow-starred flowers cover the slopes, a kind of prickly burr, whose black, barbed seed settles not only into the clothes, but into the skin, driving the traveller to despair. On the rocky islands fringing the shores oyster-beds and crabs are found, and egrets and wild doves nest there: the water is still, white and clear. It whirls out of the lake, falling only slightly at first, a hundred yards wide.

The course of the Blue Nile, which now really begins, shows how the river, like man, must, in spite of inconceivable deviations, yet travel its appointed road, and how it overcomes or circumvents every obstacle, so that it may irresistibly approach its appointed end in space and time. However clear the physical maps may look, since they take every hill as the cause of a bend, how is it possible to mistake the mysterious power which guides one river towards another through all hardships, through falls and deserts, through contradictions and ceaseless aberrations? If the whole course of a man's fate could, like that of a river, be contemplated from an aeroplane or on a map, its laws would stand clear before our eyes, and nothing would reveal the predestination governing the whole as clearly as the apparent fortuitousness of the detail. Only the man incapable of faith transfers his rationalistic scepticism to nature.

When it sets out, the Great Abbai seems to depart completely from the north-south course of the Little Abbai; to find its way north-west, it flows south-east, for the very range which gave it birth blocks its way to the goal. As beautiful in form as it is significant in symbolic strength, it streams round the Godjam Mountains, doubling its way to the White Nile, to which it was much nearer at its source. But when it enters the prairies of the Soudan, it is powerfully influenced, over a great distance, by the laws governing the

stronger; here, where no mountains stand in the way, it takes, not the shortest cut, but the same north-westerly direction as that followed by the young White Nile and all its eastern tributaries.

From its first movement on leaving Lake Tana, the Blue Nile reveals the genius within it—a rashness which is yet fruitful. While it tears a huge gorge for itself through the rock, while it whirls down headlong so rapidly that in fifty miles it falls 4,000 feet, yet from its earliest youth it brings with it in silt the elements of its later life-work, vital and productive from the beginning.

Where water and rock meet at the first cataract, the rocks are bare before the rainy season; later, when the flood has rolled away, and the river has sunk, they are covered with a flowery growth like sea-weed, with scaly stems springing from roots or air-roots, and bearing a pink and green blossom which slowly withers from its base until the rain, the next year, again washes down the rocks. On these rocky walls, the fish lie in such heaps that they can be caught with the hands, far below, bigger ones lie in wait for them, especially if they have injured themselves against the rocks.

In the midst of the wilderness, close below the outflow, an old stone bridge with many arches spans the river, lending it the romantic air of a copper engraving and speaking of ancient European civilizations, which are elsewhere alien to both the Niles. This evidence of civilization certainly makes but a brief appearance, and only when the river, having passed through the utter wilderness of its middle course, has neared its end through the plain, is it crossed by another bridge, which is of a very modern and very fatal kind. This first, basalt bridge, which the Portuguese built slanting over the river in the sixteenth century, takes it through its middle arch, then the river quickly widens. Immediately afterwards,

thirty miles from Lake Tana, the rocks narrow and force the Blue Nile, here in its very childhood, like the White Nile in the far south, to pass through the adventure of a great waterfall: this, too, is the only one in its life. The natives call it Tisitit Fall, that is, the "roaring fire," just as the Victoria Falls in Rhodesia are called "the smoke that sounds." The narrows in which the vortex breaks below simply look like a deep hole, and it is inconceivable that the huge volume of water from lake and rain can push its way through. Down there, they say, a man in a battle dared the leap over the chasm, killed his enemy on the farther side, and then achieved the still more difficult return leap.

Now the Nile is imprisoned in a canyon which, sliced into the basalt, encircles the heart of the great mountains: for five hundred miles it is inaccessible, as the ravine sometimes drops to a depth of 4,500 feet. Now it is alone, men flee not only the gorge, but the heights, for a dense pall of fumes and suffocating smoke constantly rises from the expanse of burning grass, and in it lurks fever for them and their cattle. In the mountains, ten or twelve thousand feet up, it is easier to live and breathe, and even the few explorers who have ventured below lost most of their natives by fever, were able to pay only brief visits to the bottom of the gorge, and have had to be content to represent long reaches of the river by dotted lines on their maps.

The only happy creatures on the southern Blue Nile are the animals. Here, where there are no harpoons nor spears nor bullets to startle the hippopotami and crocodiles down in their gorge, and the lions and leopards above on the banks, paradise has been preserved for them. Here all the wild animals live fearless, in heaps, pell-mell, more unmolested by man than in any other part of Africa. In delicious ignorance of the thermometer which, all the year round, even at night

never falls below 100°, the wild animals live in brooding heat, and rich in the inexhaustible quantities of animal and vegetable food which the jungle lavishes on them.

Here, at 10° N., winding about from east to west, inaccessible, so to speak, in its gorge, the Nile lives through the only long stretch of its course on which no face bends over it, no oar strikes its waters, no net catches its fish, no bodies bathe in it.

III

For a hundred rivers and brooks water the animals on the higher levels before they, in their turn, plunge into deep chasms to reach the Nile below. In this ravaged land, where the mule can go no further, and the explorer has to climb 4,000 feet down and up again to study the lower course of a brook, the Nile is often invisible from above, seems to be lost in its ravines and to flow on underground, but when it reappears, in spite of all its tributaries, it has not widened even in the rainy season. Evaporation, rapids, gravel take away the water brought by the rather insignificant tributaries.

What increases is the silt, for as most of the tributaries flow from the heart of the mountains which it encircles, the countless mineral particles flowing into it darken its colour, which was quite clear when it left Lake Tana. "Bahr-el-Asrak," as the Arabs call it, means not only a blue, but a dark, or even black river. At low water, in the dry season, when it carries only 2 per cent of solids, it often looks clear, and owing to the cloudless sky, blue, but in flood-time, with 17 per cent of solids, it turns reddish and dark, and millions of white ants, washed down with the water, swell the mud: recent English scientists have even put forward the astonishing

theory that it is the termites which throw up the fresh earth, and are swept away with it, and so become the true fathers of the Nile mud.

Up in the highlands, where men live, all the mineral deposits from the volcanoes are overgrown with a profusion of tropical vegetation. "The most beautiful country I ever saw," said Blundell, one of the few white men who were ever there, for here in the south of Abyssinia the land does not dry up so horribly even in the dry season as it does in the north, where in February it is impossible to understand how anybody could have placed the Garden of Eden in so repellent a region. Here, to the north of the Abbai, the rain awakens a forest of magic colour.

The forest is shot with red and gold. From the immense baobab, which sometimes reaches a girth of sixty feet, from the huge euphorbias, hang the purple tufts of the loranthus: the dense hapericum bushes rustle in a sea of yellow blossom, beds of pale-blue clematis hang from the tamarisks, cascades of royal-blue salvias, festoons of wild vine cover and sometimes kill what lives beneath them, for miles on end the gardenia shines through the green, the opalescent blooms of the protea cover forests of unknown extent, and the tree veronica forms tunnels so rich in flower that a caravan "could be buried in them."

High up in their mountain retreats, the natives can cultivate maize and corn without difficulty: the earth and the rain do the work for them: they are less successful with the cotton, and even the coffee runs wild, as the vine once did in this region. With a plough such as Adam may have made after the expulsion, they turn up the soil anyhow, like the wild boars.

These lowest tribes of the land live as primitively as the negroes on the Upper White Nile, but they keep a domestic

pet whom they treat like a princely guest. Someone or other, whether a medicine man at court or some white man, when killing a civet cat, discovered the strong odour exuding from one of its glands—it may have been the three-hundredth concubine of the Emperor, who anointed herself with it, trying to befool her lord. In any case, the great ones of the land all at once began to seek this perfume, sent slaves through the country and found it here on the southernmost reaches of the Nile. Since then, the natives have caught these cats in snares. They keep them tame in their huts, give them beef for breakfast and porridge and milk for dinner. They even go so far as to warm their homes in winter in case the precious gland should be chilled. Then they scratch out of the gland a foamy white secretion which smells of musk, and collect it in ox-horns, and when the trader comes from the town, he gives them in exchange bars of salt and cloths, or silver money. Thus black men in the wild mountains of Abyssinia, who know nothing save hunger, hunting, and love, are made rich by the refinements of a distant court, increase their herds and fields, and in the end are no happier than their brothers, who empty no cats' glands.

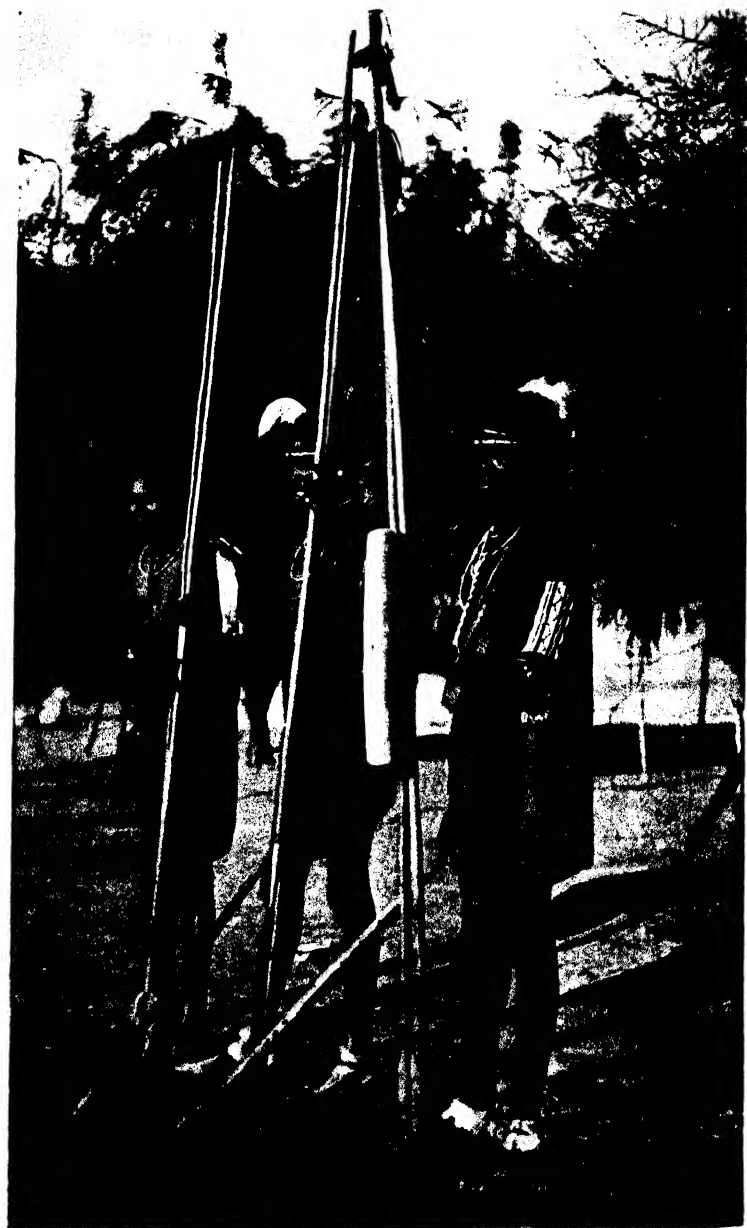
Other animals are less familiar with court life. The gigantic grey baboon, which, in age, with its grey-black mane, is startlingly like a derelict tramp, breaks into the cornfields, but if he has been delayed, and only arrives for dessert, groups appear, gleaning in turn, more than ever like men, and the leopards, against which the great apes have set sentinels to protect their young, are doubly afraid. Not until the apes have gone do the leopards invade the villages.

Here, too, the elephants are the cleverest; they know exactly when the natives carry up the ripe corn on camels to their villages: then they charge, the camels cast their loads, and the giant gets what he wanted. Once upon a time, says



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the legend, a king invaded this country in order to subject the negroes. As he seemed to these negroes as terrible and wicked as the dreaded robber of their fields, they called aloud “Jan Hoy! Thou elephant!” The king had the word explained to him: being an Oriental, he had a sense of humour, stopped his depredations and promised justice and help to any who should call him by that name. Therefore later supplicants cast themselves at his feet in his capital crying “Jan Hoy!” and in the end the word came to mean merely “Oh King! Your Majesty!” Thus an ordinary emperor of Abyssinia was invested with the honour and the title of the strongest and cleverest animal of creation.

In winter, the elephant retires to the wild south, scaling slopes that defy man. Here, where the Blue Nile receives the Didessa from the left and begins its great sweep to the north, the elephant is attracted by young bamboo forests. There hundreds of great trees lie prone: these are heglic trees, of whose little sweet fruit the elephant is inordinately fond. Like many strong men, he has a sweet tooth, and so he stands shaking the tree with his trunk, but if nothing falls off, he simply overthrows the whole tree, and then stands picking up the sugar-plums carefully one by one.

Below that loop of the river, the highlands gradually fall away, the gorge grows milder: first a few miles of the stream can be seen, then comes the plain of the Fung province. Isolated groups of hills merge into the Soudan lowlands. Before it leaves Abyssinia, the Nile is confronted with a strange sight, which throws a far-reaching light on to the fate of the country.

At the mouths of the Didessa and similar rivers flowing into the Nile near the frontiers of the Soudan, a few hundred naked negroes sit cowering in the water. What are they doing here in the torrid heat, whose fevers they generally shun?

Others come out of the forest carrying a kind of hockey-stick and a flat wooden platter, with a little gourd hanging from their ear by a string. Then they crouch in the shallows, feel about along the stones with deft fingers, search their flat hands with a rapid glance and throw most of the dross back, but what they collect on the platter glistens in the sun. When the day's work is over, they pour their takings into the gourd and carry it to the overseer, who weighs it up with little European scales.

By the deep erosion of the overlying basalt, the gneissic strata below have been so denuded that whole tracts are covered with gravel and flakes of quartz. That they contained gold was already known in ancient times, and the fate of the country has been determined by the search for gold and slaves. In many other places, the god of the subterranean fires, before heaving up the earth, mixed gold with it, and as it can be easily seen and washed out of the rivers, the princes of the country have worked it since prehistoric times. Once it was even believed that the land of Ophir lay here. At present, the annual revenue is said to amount to £80,000, but when have absolute rulers ever given accurate accounts of their revenues? And the Emperor straightway officially keeps half as a tax.

It is collected in quills, made into rings and stamped, then sold. What is brought into the country in exchange? Machinery and arms. Who profits by them? The natives, cowering for ten hours in the river washing the gold from the volcanic debris for the kings, are slaves—Galla—who get neither salt nor silver, neither necklaces nor cows for it. Far away from them, where the glandular secretion of the civet cats is transformed into the perfumes of Addis-Ababa, under the lights of a richly carpeted room, the gold glitters on the neck of some lady whose Byzantine eyes are hungry for the gifts of life,

or it has been metamorphosed into a smart, well-sprung English car in the depths of which a ring-bedecked Ras reclines, brooding new desires and new revenge.

Just as he brooded three thousand years ago.

IV

In those days, the loveliest and most famous princess of Abyssinia adorned herself with gold and jewels to ride to Jerusalem, where, it was said, there reigned a prince as handsome and as famous as herself, whom she was impatient to greet in person. Actually, she was the ruler of the land which later bore the splendid name of Arabia Felix. Merchants had come from Palestine to Yemen to seek costly building stones and to take them, whatever their price, to their lord, who was building a temple to the glory of his god, Jehovah. The mouth of that king, they said, was overflowing with story and fable, but most of all with songs of love, and none could say whether he knew more of wisdom or of women.

So the Queen of Sheba journeyed to King Solomon, and each found favour in the other's sight; but being a clever woman, she held him off at first and refused to lodge in his palace. When he began to pay court to her, she led the talk into the domain of wisdom, and he must perforce spend whole evenings philosophizing with the lovely woman, from whom he desired entertainment of a very different kind, for Solomon was a gentleman. When at last the day of her departure approached, and the caravan of the guest was laden with truly Jewish lavishness by the king, she became aware of the growing restlessness of her host who, for all his wisdom, now felt very foolish and she loosed the reins of her decorum, for, with feminine logic, she argued that she could, after all, leave

the next day. So she plucked up courage and told the king that she would spend her last night in his palace if he would swear not to molest her, while she, for her part, would promise to lay hands on nothing that was his. King Solomon in his wisdom grasped the double meaning in her words, but just to make sure, summoned his cook and told him to spice the farewell meal as he had never done before.

Then the Queen saw that her host had understood her, and when at last she was alone with him under his roof, spices and wine had done their work so well that she only needed to say to him:

"I will release you from your vow, O King, if you will give me to drink."

The courteous king fulfilled her wish in every way. Her departure was postponed. Now he was more than ever reluctant to let her go and she seems to have put no difficulties in his way. But when she was with child, and, as the months passed, her state became obvious to the whole court, she decided to depart, and with the Song of Solomon he seems then to have sung his swan-song. It was high time for her to go, for on the way she gave birth to a son, whom she called Menilek Ibm Hakim, that is, the Son of Wisdom, and he was very handsome.

When he had come to the throne, the youth visited his father in Jerusalem, was received with great rejoicing and sent away with great gifts from all the twelve tribes of Israel, with warriors and priests, who were to give the Abyssinians thorough instruction in the Jewish religion. But hardly was Menilek gone when dismay fell upon Solomon: the Ark of the Covenant, the tables of stone on which Moses had written down the commandments of the Lord, the most holy possession of the Jews, had gone! Later, Menilek declared that his priests had stolen it without his knowledge, but any king

would say so in such a situation. That is what priests and ministers are for. One thing is certain, that his father, in his wisdom, swore the High Priest to secrecy and pursued the caravan himself, but it had vanished. As so often happened in those times, angels had protected the robbers, who made their escape by passages under the Red Sea to their royal fortress. But Solomon had the tables copied by a good forger, and none of the Jews ever knew that from that time on, the Ark that they worshipped was a fake.

So busily have Arab and rabbinical legends spun their enigmas round the figure of the Queen of Sheba as Biltis and Sibyl that she even had to prophesy the cross of Christ. To this very day, the Abyssinians cling to this legend, and have painted it a hundredfold on the walls of their churches. To-day they have it printed in Paris or London and distribute it broadcast over the country, and the lovers lie first in two, and then in one somewhat modern bed. But the Song of Solomon is obviously too gallant to have been addressed to the mother of their race: they declare that he laid it in the lap of one of Pharaoh's daughters, and strove in vain to forbid their young women and priests to read it, since they read it together.

In this amorous fashion, a dynasty was founded which, in historic times, from 800 B.C. to A.D. 800 ruled longer than any other on the Mediterranean. No wonder that a clever prince, seeking in our own time to establish himself as ruler of this land, proclaimed his descent from this royal house of Solomon, and took the name of Menilek.

What has happened since at this edge of Africa is only to be understood through the mingling of the races and cultures which approached Abyssinia over the Red Sea and through the Nubian desert: the Abyssinians know that, and have themselves called their country Habesh, that is,

the mixture. Every state in Europe might bear the name of Habesh.

For the conquering and trading peoples of antiquity were always drawn to the land which contained gold, ivory, and slaves. Which races supplanted which, how far the Hamitic peoples pushed the Semitic southwards—such things are uncertain, and are merely a parlour-game for professors. The Ethiopians seem only once to have invaded a foreign civilization when, about 730 B.C., they conquered Egypt, bringing back with them later many Egyptian gods and customs. The Greeks, who called this country and its neighbour Kush by the general name of Ethiopia—the name it again bears to-day—became mixed with Jewish and Arab elements: Axum, the remains of which were recently excavated in the north of Abyssinia, for a long time ruled Arabia too. To complete the confusion of cultures, a Jewish-Arab king about A.D.300 called himself "Son of Ares:" this scion of the Greek gods was the first to be baptized, obviously in expiation. Thus the Son of Ares wore the legendary three rings on his finger before the legend came into being. For the Abyssinians became Christians long before most of the white peoples, and the curious fact that these brown races possess to-day a Christian cult fifteen centuries old provides a unique opportunity for inquiring how far they have reached a higher stage of moral development than their heathen and Mohammedan neighbours.

Beset on both sides, the young Christianity wavered. When the Abyssinian Christians threatened Mecca, they were repulsed in the very year of Mohammed's birth: soon after, they had to withdraw from southern Arabia on account of small-pox, one of the few cases in history in which a pestilence has involved world-wide political consequences. At that point the struggle between the two religions began. Meanwhile, in

this Greek-Arab-Christian chorus, the Jews raised their voice, and endeavoured from the sixteenth century on to re-establish their religion in Abyssinia, long after the Greek Ethiopians are believed to have embraced the Jewish faith. This was carried out not by missionaries, but by the influence of nomads transmitting their customs to other nomads. While they called themselves "fellasha," that is "the misunderstood," the Jews grew strong.

In the ninth century history took an ironic turn, for which documentary evidence again exists. A Jewish princess in Abyssinia drove out the dynasty descended from Solomon, which had later become Christian, and, under the name of Queen Judith, made herself mistress of the north. Not for four hundred years, till about 1260, did a Christian prince of the south, who traced his descent from Menilek and Solomon, succeed in conquering the descendants of Judith, and the new king draped his lust of power and his jealousies with anti-Semitic speeches, just as if he had lived seven hundred years later.

In bestowing upon themselves the title of Archpriest, these Christian kings made themselves no whit better than Judith. The kaleidoscope of their history, in the next few centuries, turns in bewildering pictures. Conquered queens were hacked in pieces and thrown to the dogs, and after their death the monks walked in public procession: there were chaste-living clerics who compensated themselves with wine and roast meat, invaded heathen chiefs, feasted with them, and then had their hosts slaughtered by their slaves, and all these were Christians, proud of their faith, who boasted of being the oldest sect.

V

At first, Abyssinia was believed to be the land of Paradise, and even Josephus acknowledged the Nile to be one of the two Biblical rivers. But since, after the Fall, gold and power became men's chief motives, the nations came hither seeking gold and slaves: the land had no defence save mountains and rain. While in the plains of the Soudan, princes and dynasties, in the course of the ages, succumbed again and again to foreign marauders, the land of mountain fastnesses, like Switzerland, held all at bay: here the rain swept away roads and armies, for the land, save at one point, falls steeply even to the Red Sea, where, since prehistoric times, the commerce of the world has streamed past. Thus, of all the empires which crossed Africa from 10° to 15° N. lat., only one has remained, the country of the Blue Nile, a natural fortress.

From the ancient Egyptians to the traders of to-day, men came here seeking incense and ivory, gold and slaves: Abyssinian ivory goes back in Egypt even to pre-historic times: in the train of the merchants, three religions and four or five different civilizations spread light and chaos through these steep and narrow mountain valleys. But if they tried to conquer the country, mountains, precipices and rivers, men and rain united to expel the intruders. Yet the same elements split this empire up into so many separate lands that no one has ever been able to rule it as a whole: the princes are perpetually at war with each other, and compel every man to be a soldier. If no one could conquer this strange empire from the outside, no one could govern it within: disunited and impregnable, encircled by desire and curiosity, the natural fortress rises like a humped shoulder at the edge of the continent, courted by the white powers which govern

its neighbours, for it conceals within it the sources of the mysterious river which yet, as we shall see later, is innocent of all the legend woven round it.

Historical documents, stretching back thousands of years, tell of all the conquering strangers who were driven out of Abyssinia, from the oldest reports on papyrus of Egyptian journeys and landings on the Red Sea to the stone tablets recording the treaties of the Queen of Sheba, from the obelisks of the Ethiopians, which were raised a thousand years before Christ by methods we cannot even imagine, to Herodotus, who tells in a fable of the treasures of Abyssinia. Here Roman emperors caught elephants to perform for the amusement of the people, and Byzantine emperors bartered worthless things for gold.

In ancient history, one white people after the other penetrated into those inaccessible and pathless regions, yet none remained, and native princes have ruled with hardly an exception from Solomon's day to our own.

Even later, the great sea-faring peoples only succeeded in establishing trade here. Venice drove the Arabs from the Red Sea coast, so that they had once more to carry the gold and ivory of Abyssinia through the desert on camels. The only memorial left behind by this strongest sea-power of its time were the bad pictures of an adventurer who was hailed here as a second Titian because he came from Venice: even to-day, the traveller is struck by the Italian style of their crude sacred pictures.

Once, in distress, an Abyssinian Negus, Emperor, and Archpriest, recalled his Christian descent and called on the Pope for help against the infidels: the Pope confined himself to a fine Latin letter, which nobody in Abyssinia could read, and gave the pious Moors a church in Rome which, eight centuries later, is still called San Stefano dei Mori. Later,

Abyssinian pilgrims in Jerusalem heard that the mightiest Christian of the time was the King of Portugal, but when the glittering embassy reached his court, he turned his back on the "negroes," not trusting their Christianity. So deep was the darkness in which the Abyssinians lived three centuries after their entry into Rome.

Not until the next century did the Christian brothers embrace, and he who was powerful promise help to the oppressed. In the meantime, the Portuguese had heard that in that dubious Moorish land there were not only ivory and slaves to be had for nothing, but hearsay told that the earth itself consisted of two parts of gold to one of soil, and though the king thought that must be an exaggeration, he hoped perhaps for one part of gold to two of soil. At first, the Portuguese had to pay dearly for their adventures. When they advanced from the Red Sea to help the king against the Arabs, who had spread over half Abyssinia from Egypt, converting it to Islam by force, one of their noblest knights, the son of Vasco da Gama, was not only captured and tortured, but his victorious enemy beheaded him afterwards with his own hands. The conquered Christians were castrated to a man. This happened in 1541. Centuries were to pass before the literal revenge—member for member—was taken. Two years later, the Portuguese were victorious and restored the Abyssinian king. How was King Claudius to show his gratitude now?

By way of thanks, he decided to have himself baptized in a slightly different form by adopting the Catholic ritual, and thus conjured up fresh struggles. Portuguese scientists and merchants remained in the country. The procedure of former kings had been never to let an ambassador go, but to pay him in women and treasure for advice of priceless value, and thus, in the most graceful way, to hold him prisoner. Then,

north of Lake Tana, the Portuguese built the fortress and city of Gondar, with huge round towers and frowning walls like those in Toledo, which are the only bit of Europe, outside of the modern capital, to stand out from the negroid architecture of the empire.

But it seemed the inevitable fate of this wild mountain land to be rent by religious warfare, whose storms tore as much away from the natural fortress as the rain and the Nile. Roman Jesuits, sent out by the Pope, went restlessly about the land in quest of power. On the confines of the Christian world, among half-negroes, the struggle for the teaching of Christ began at the same time and with the same passion as in Europe. When the Mohammedan menace had disappeared, the Christians decided to fall upon each other. Why did these Arab-Jewish chiefs, whose churches were huts, and whose religious ceremonies were drums and shrieks, batter each others' heads in?

Jesus was anointed by the Holy Ghost, but he did not need him. Wrong, cried the antagonists, his dual nature was first made one by this anointment. Wrong again, cried yet others, he could only fulfil the Redemption through the Holy Ghost. At times all three sects united in the cry "Kill the Jews!" Then they again fell apart and in the very year 1630, in which Gustavus Adolphus, Wallenstein, and Tilly were driving Christians before their guns, each in the delusion that he possessed the true Christ, Coptic and Catholic priests in Abyssinia were setting loose their flocks on each other with sword and lance for the interpretation of the same doctrine.

In these sectarian disputes the empire fell apart, just like the German Empire at the same time. The heathen Galla, a mixed race of negroes, Hamites and Arabs, invaded the country from the south, the capital shifted about perpetually in rebellions and dynastic changes, the Negus in Gondar

became a shadow, every prince ruled with his own mailed fist, if not with his own head. Two centuries of anarchy were brought to an end in 1850 by an adventurer, Kasa, who began as a bandit chief, like the Homeric heroes and modern dictators, and who, to provide for all contingencies, took the title of Negus Negesti, or King of Kings, and at the same time the name of Theodorus.

This Christian Archpriest, who began by trading in kosso, the remedy for tapeworm, then rose as rapidly from robber chief to emperor as Napoleon from lieutenant to emperor, also recalls certain phenomena of our time in that he lost his head in gaining power, settled down to be a monster, killed all who stood in his way, and finally forced the Patriarch to consecrate him at the revolver's point. The death of his second wife plunged him into gloom, and as his third was merely the daughter of a powerful prince, he consoled himself with a beautiful Galla woman. As both the slender women had to accompany him on all his campaigns, their tents stood at equal distances on each side of his scarlet imperial tent, but on the march, just to make sure, the rivals rode half an hour apart.

The only Europeans whom Theodorus acknowledged were the English, because he wanted their help against the Egyptians. His friendship for two Englishmen was so intense that, to avenge their death in one of his battles, he had hundreds of prisoners beheaded. But as the Irish hunter and the Scottish consul were, after all, dead, he could see only one figure in England worthy of him, namely, the Queen. For she had just become a widow, and would assuredly be glad to strengthen her power over a number of dark races by a union with the most powerful emperor in Africa. In 1862, without further ado, he sent her an offer of marriage.

The incredible happened; the letter remained unanswered.

It was hardly to be expected that the mightiest of emperors was going to suffer the affront. The Negus was beside himself, and had the English ambassador, Cameron, cast into prison and chained to a common criminal. Now, for the first time, a great white power took the field against Abyssinia: the English punitive expedition advanced, besieged the King of Kings in his fort, and demanded the release of the prisoners. But then the adventurer recalled his bold beginnings. He shot himself, and by this resolute gesture won the respect of posterity for his character, for at least he knew how to pay up.

VI

It was the mountains which made the Abyssinians warriors; for thousands of years, the rain has interrupted every war. In Abyssinia, hate can only flourish from October to May. With the help of these two elements, this half savage mountain people even made a successful stand against the second latest technique of warfare: in the seventies and nineties, they inflicted a crushing defeat on two peoples equipped with modern arms—first Egypt, three times, then Italy—driving them from the country. When, in 1885, the Soudan was in the hands of the Mahdi, Egypt fully occupied, and Abyssinia threatened by the Mahdi's followers, it was easy for Italy to assume the role of protector of the country with the object of securing, at the last moment, a precious lump of the great black cake. The embroilments of the great powers even then seemed to be deciding the fate of Abyssinia: no one believed it could hold out.

But when the last Emperor had fallen on the frontier fighting against the Mahdi, one of his most powerful vassals had proclaimed himself Emperor, and as he had, at that

moment, good reason to dread the power of the Mahdists, he preferred to cede to Italy a certain amount of territory with a general protectorate. This remarkable man had learned from the white tribes that it is the proper thing to have a noble lineage attested by the competent authorities, and hence took the name of Menilek II, as the blood descendant of the first Menilek who, three thousand years before, had, like Euph Orion, inherited the beauty of the Arab Helen with the wisdom of the Jewish Faust.

This second Menilek was, it is true, rather cunning than wise, and though he was handsome, all the same there was something of the lion about him. Neither Semitic nor negro features distinguish him in his blondness from a nordic type, and, if the big lower lip on his portraits is covered, he looks like some robust Scandinavian whose eyes might have been grey-blue. Less cruel, more rustic, more sensible than his countrymen and peers, thoughtful and humorous, his manners have little in common with those of his predecessors. His hands and handwriting were equally beautiful, so far as the Amharic letters can be judged.

In his youth, as the son of a mighty prince, he had sought to legitimate himself in every possible way. Having, at the age of forty-five, taken the reins of power into his hands, he made his rival his friend by giving him his daughter to wife, and turned for support to the priests, about whom he had no illusions. As the Negus is master of all the possessions of his subjects, a kind of reversed communism, he let the princes go on stealing as they liked, altered nothing at the head of the state, and very little below, and drew his innovations rather from his inborn common sense than from the imitation of the whites, from whom he adopted little except the army. He tolerated no prisons because "I will not have criminals fed at the expense of honest men, quickly forgotten

and never seen." He had the less serious offenders flogged, the more serious mutilated on the face or the genitals, so that they should go about as a scandal and a warning. In his new capital, Addis-Ababa, he would often, on a Sunday, entertain three or four thousand of his subjects, mostly soldiers, distributing among them ten thousand loaves, five hundred gallons of mead and two hundred oxen.

Like all barbarians, and most white men, nothing impressed him so much as the achievements of technical science, but he regarded them with the innocence of a child and a soldier. When he was shown the model of a modern bridge, he refused to believe that it would stand firm, and proved himself right by breaking the model with his fist: a second, more solidly constructed, convinced him because he could not break it. He was the first to have gold coins minted with the effigy of the Emperor, oiling the minting machine with his own hands: when the first coins fell out, he wrapped them up in his handkerchief and took them home to his wife. He trusted his telescope more than his spies: having been warned against assassins, he mounted his tower, searched the streets and squares with his glass, and came down reassured. When the effect of the explosion of mines by electricity was demonstrated to him with puppets, he broke out indignantly: "That is the way you want to make war? What is the use of a man being brave if a coward can destroy thousands at a distance by pressing a button!" With this splendid flash of vision, a bold African warrior reduced to absurdity the white theory of heroism.

The decisive act of his life was perhaps due to a mistake, for when he concluded the Italian convention he seems to have overestimated the power of that state, and to have known too little about its greater rivals in Africa. It may be that he only made use of Italy in order to gain security and time to

arm. In any case, he declared himself free to negotiate with other white powers, since in the convention he had only expressed his "right" to use Italy in his dealings with them. The Italians, on the other hand, argued that he was "bound" by the convention to use Italy as a channel for communication. Since a mere "right" would be pure nonsense in this case, it may be inferred that the whole thing was a trick by which he was trying to evade the treaty. His army was ready, the danger from the Mahdi past, the natural fastness, with the mountains and the rain, as impregnable as when the volcanoes were created. Thus he could venture on a duel with Italy and his victory was decisive. Now vengeance was exacted for that battle of three and a half centuries before: in good old fashion the Christian Emperor of Abyssinia had a large number of his Christian enemies castrated.

But it was not that outrage that made the cabinets of Europe tremble: a minister never thinks of the fate of his soldiers, otherwise he would stop making war. He thinks in terms of countries whose inhabitants are not present to his mind, a lack of imagination which has cost the lives of millions of men who showed far more imagination, since they believed in the ideals held up to them, for which it was a duty and an honour to die.

After the Battle of Adua, in 1896, the most far-seeing Europeans were gloomy. A great white power had suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of a coffee-brown tribe. Did that mean the rise of the coloured peoples, the revolt of the black soul? Had it been shown once for all that Abyssinia was by nature proof against conquest, like Russia? And had the source of the Nile, on whose possession the fate of two great countries depended, for ever slipped out of European hands? The Mahdists, though weakening, still dominated the Soudan, and the legendary "key to the Nile," stories of which



[By permission of the R.A.F.]

MARSH AROUND THE BAHR-EL-GHAZAL (THE RIVER OF GAZELLES)



circulated through an ignorant world, could decide who was to be master there and in Egypt. The victor of Adua, however, impressed his white colleagues by demanding from conquered Italy, when peace was concluded, neither more nor less than Bismarck after Sadowa, namely, recognition.

Menilek, the strongest African of modern times, was destroyed by a woman. Taitu means "The Mote in the Sunbeam," in reality, she was a designing woman, who, in the then Prince Menilek, married her fifth husband: slender and fragile, she has nothing in common with the pictures of the fat old woman whose features spread all over Europe as hers. It was her white skin which had made her so much desired. As he remained childless, and appointed his daughter's son to be his heir, while she had fixed on her brother as Emperor, hoping to retain some share of power, she resorted to a method much in favour among the nobles of Abyssinia: she gave him poison; it did not kill him, although he was well on in the sixties. His mind clouded, his body paralysed in turns, the miserable man, in lucid moments, grasped what was going on and once more appointed his heir.

Court intrigues darkened his shadowy end. When Menilek died in 1913, in his seventieth year, he had united his empire after an anarchy lasting more than a century, and made one whole out of seven kingdoms and widespread colonies.

VII

Two travellers are wending their way through the mountain gorge by the side of a half-dry river. The big man in front is the Apostle Peter, just as he stands on the mosaics of Ravenna, the bronzed face framed in long brown hair and a short black beard, with black, liquid eyes, and a headdress

without shape or colour: in his hands he bears before him a great naked sword with a cross on the hilt, such as the Crusaders used to carry. Behind him, his slave, in his loose grey garment, bare-legged, without hat or shoes, is so bowed by the weight of the burden he carries that his face is hidden. Thus the real Abyssinian, far from the capital, journeys through his mountains, sometimes by mule, often on foot, in the year of Our Lord 1930, though it might be 1130.

In the interior, it is impossible to distinguish the types, which on the coast show more definitely Arab, in the south more definitely negroid features. Here a predominantly Hamitic stock has been modified by overwhelming mixture, and darkened by blood and the sun, and it seems almost symbolic that nearly all the tribes have a yellow conjunctiva and yellow half-moons to their nails. An unexplained peculiarity is that they are nearly all left-handed, carry their weapons and use their implements with their left hands, and mount their horses on the off-side, while the only thing that these orientals regard as an exception, as something sacred, namely, money, they tender with the right hand.

The nobles look like the apostles. There sits St. Mark in a white cloak, with tight-fitting trousers and sleeves, his sword at his side, absolutely Byzantine in his woven chair, with slaves washing his feet. Others, in their clay huts, don gaudy, richly-embroidered cloaks to meet their guests, while their bearing, their features, their bronzed skin and splendid colours make them look as if they had stepped out of a group by Tintoretto. This, and their dark eyes, their silence and seeking, and the weapons they never lay aside, give them the dramatic mien of prophets. The greatest of all, called Ras, with their silken cloak fastened only at the top by a narrow band fitting closely to the neck, would look like Titian portraits if their lips were thinner: behind them, there gleams in the gloom

a shield, a short sword and a lance. In stature and colour they generally look healthy, and they live long in the pure mountain air.

Reserve seems to enfold the upper-class women with their almond eyes; they seldom go out, and only at home, where they are generally allowed to sit with the men, can the skill of their hairdressing be seen: this is their chief occupation, though their hair looks short, as it is deftly woven into many tight plaits, while the half-open hair of the men looks longer. The butter which both sexes rub into their hair smells rancid, but the women are so proud of their handiwork that they sleep at night with their head on a block of wood for fear of disarranging it. Like the savage tribes in Paris they pluck out their eyebrows, and paint arched ones in brown: further, their lids are painted black, their hands and feet red or brown.

Abyssinia is a theocracy, and as such has no real religious feeling: everything has petrified into rites, in this apathetic Middle Ages without mysticism, which is sunk in superstition and ruined by trade. According to the accounts of the most observant travellers, the line of morality rises from the Christians through the Mohammedans to the Jews and the heathens.

With flowing black or grey beards, gigantic white turbans, and shoes turned up at the toes, with a cross of bone or metal dangling on their breasts, priests and monks wander through the country by hundreds of thousands. Many say millions. The upper ranks are men of learning, and like most of the Copts, have some knowledge of the world: they refuse to be enticed out of their cloud of wisdom, and threaten with the death penalty the translation of the Bible from old Ethiopian into the living Amharic. By excommunication and other psychological methods, they have got possession of large tracts of land, which they farm out or have tilled by slaves; they lend money and hire out service, and in other ways live, like the

medieval bishops, on their influence over the chiefs. The Archbishop, whose title is "Pope of the Copts and Abyssinians," and who is elected by the central Coptic synod in Alexandria, must be a layman of a low class. He is then carefully educated, solemnly consecrated and sent out, but may never again leave Abyssinia. The prisoner of the Vatican had an easier life.

The mass of the priests have less difficulty in veiling their wisdom from the eyes of the people. They are completely uneducated, some cannot even read. Some man, too poor to live like a lord, too lazy to learn the use of arms, in his youth, by services rendered, by money or relationship, has won the favour of a higher priest, who has made the sign of the cross three times over him, breathed on him, and thus ordained him priest, much as the German princes used to become regimental commanders. Thus, for the rest of his life, he is provided for: he must be fed, for he can bless and give absolution: he is despised and feared by all. These lower orders of the clergy may marry, but only once: if their wife dies, it is all over. If white women, now that they have the vote, were to set up this rule as law, divorce in favour of the women would become more difficult. Idle and penniless, their numbers swelled by the dethroned, the disinherited, or by political criminals who find sanctuary in the cloisters, terrorized by menaces from within and without, monks and nuns live in sloth and love affairs and have forfeited all respect. This legion of mendicant monks has no occupation save lofty debates with foreign missionaries on the dual nature of Jesus, and whether he was baptized once, twice, or thrice.

When the priest celebrates the divine office in the fine high-land church huts, as often as not wrapped in a sheepskin, for they are always cold, holding the cross and rosary in his huge peasant fists, neither he nor any man present must have looked at a woman for twenty-four hours, but the African

howls of the faithful, men and women, the din of the drums, the braying of the asses and the lowing of the cows, recalls an orgy. If piety could be measured by the number of church festivals, then the Abyssinian Copts would have no equal for piety: two thirds of the days in the year are feast days, every Wednesday and Sunday fast-days, and, considering the general laziness, it is difficult to say what is cause and what effect.

Thus the majority of the Abyssinians—there are no certain figures, four millions of the ten are said to be “pure”—live proud to belong to the oldest Christian sect, in a mental twilight, far inferior to the negroes on Lake Victoria, to whom no faith and no dogma ever penetrated. Yet they have nothing of the divine innocence of the Dinka, vegetating in the sun, but only a spurious faith in God which gave them pride and deprived them of freedom.

The Mohammedans are more industrious: they are said to number only a few hundred thousands and live mostly in the northerly province of Harrar. Even though the fabrics they weave are not very good, they work hard, and although they misunderstand the precepts of their hygienic religion, they at any rate keep them. As the hippopotamus is called the river hog, they do not eat it because pork is prohibited. For their girls, they have invented or adopted—for it exists on the middle White Nile too—a device which even the Crusaders could not match with their girdles: they sew them up with horsehair so that they shall enter marriage chaste. Jealous husbands have introduced the same practice among their wives before going on a journey. It comes cheaper than having them guarded by eunuchs, who are very expensive here.

As to the *falasha*, the Jews, who, numbering about fifty thousand, represent to-day only about a half per cent of the total population, it cannot be definitely ascertained whether

they came with their religion a thousand years before Christ, or only after the beginning of the Christian era. The Jewish monotheism, which then stood alone, early attracted the Arabs and converted the princes. Nowadays they know no Hebrew, do not believe in the Messiah, and carry on no trade. Moreover, in physique, they resemble the other Abyssinians in the African cast of mouth and nose, while on the other side of the Red Sea, on the same latitude, they stand out clearly from the Arabs. They are only distinguished here by their common sense and their high moral standard, which is acknowledged in all Christian and Mohammedan accounts: a German traveller even described them as the most useful inhabitants of the country.

They are the best artisans in Abyssinia, the only smiths, the most in demand as builders, chemists, potters, and silver-smiths. Settled in the neighbourhood of the capital and round about Lake Tana, they sometimes own land, but are not rich and neither lend money nor hire out service. Their churches are very like those of the Christians, but they keep secret their rites, emblems, and books, which are Amharic. They keep the rules of food and ablution and purify themselves after any contact with a non-Jew. They know nearly as little of the Bible as the Christians.

The influence of Jewish on Christian rites, though the Christians came much later, seems to be as strong as ever, despite the great decrease in the numbers of the Jews. The Christians have adopted from them circumcision for both sexes, keep the Sabbath holy as well as Sunday, and reckon their calendar from the beginning of the world: their priests dance round the Holy of Holies, they build their churches on the plan of Solomon's temple, prefer the Old Testament, believe in the return to Jerusalem, and say in greeting: "The Sabbath be with thee."

The heathen Galla who, in the fourteenth century, advanced from Mount Elgon in the south on account of the lack of pasture, and are numerous to-day all over the country both among chiefs and among slaves, are accounted the best soldiers with sword and bow and arrow, but use no firearms: they are splendid horsemen, and hence are much used as mercenaries by the chiefs in their mutual wars. In contrast to the Christians, they are described as hard-working, energetic, and temperate, but they have all the Christian cruelty and vindictiveness. It was they perhaps who first introduced the custom of castrating the enemy and hanging the severed organ as a trophy on their belt or on the dead man's door. If the wife lives with the victor without her dead husband being represented on the doorpost, the other women abuse her. The Galla are said to practise human sacrifice to their gods, lots being cast for the victim in time of dearth: at the source of the Nile, which they fear, they sacrifice cows and bulls. They worship the sun, fire, and trees, and three great stones on the Blue Nile which fell from the sun, but their customs vary from village to village, and when among them there appear vestiges of ancient Egyptian civilization, with its priest-king and holy bull, there rises before the eyes a panorama of cultures such as only the Nile, in the whole western world, could produce.

VIII

The narrowness of the gorges, the phenomenon of the rain, the size of the country, which is bigger than France and Italy put together, the difficulty of government in a land refractory to centralization and bound by no ancient sense

of the community, like Switzerland, the warlike spirit which hampers industry, the crowd of priests, whom all shun, the absolutism of a central power perpetually assaulted by individuals, all these factors would simply produce anarchy if the slaves were not there to form a foundation. Through them, any attempt at social reform becomes superfluous, the social question is solved in the simplest way, and if these people were not Christians, there would be nothing against it. The conflict between power and faith is not greater, it is only more obvious than among the white races of Europe.

It begins with the Most Christian Emperor, who, only thirty years ago, had five hundred concubines, twenty of whom he kept in the immediate vicinity of his palace. The strange fallacy of all these tribes, that a ruler must have as many sons as possible, seems to play a determining part in this question. In old Arabia, where grace was blended with dignity, and not only in the Arabian Nights, a sultan's mistress received lavish gifts. To-day the Christian Emperor regards such a position as so desirable that every concubine must bring a great dowry with her, cattle and horses, slaves and furs, or, as we sometimes read in the marriage-contracts: "Twelve cats to kill the mice." She must, too, become Christian. But, as the natural mother of the Emperor's son, she is better off than the Empress, for the legitimate sons are generally cast into prison at the advent of a new ruler. This relationship is much clearer in the Koran, while above both stands the heathen negro, who uses women as units of labour, and would not even understand the difference between legitimate and illegitimate children, the most immoral idea that the white races have produced.

The new Emperor, who was crowned in 1930, is more modern than he will admit, although he rules quite after the manner of a Caliph. A single railway crosses the country,

a single telephone line enters the capital, and beside Lake Tana, posts of a telegraph line which was destroyed lie prone. Though the Emperor dines off gold plate, the houses of his three towns are mostly of straw. He summons his two "chambers," but their function is to nod their heads. And yet he was shrewd enough to marry one of his princes to a relative of a Japanese cotton-king when he granted large concessions to Japan in 1932.

When the Emperor gives one of his numerous feasts to keep his bodyguard in good humour, the whole spectacle is operatic: he and his court are separated by huge curtains from the great hall in which two thousand soldiers are feasting. In front of the curtain is a scene from the Middle Ages, with kneeling courtiers, and a sovereign eating, drinking, listening to the minstrel, governing at the same time. Behind the curtain, the people squat at low tables, with much noise and smacking of lips, to music usually consisting of trumpets and drums: among them hundreds of slaves carry about whole sheep and haunches of oxen, from which the guests hack pieces with their knives, and basins of water and towels for them to wash their greasy fingers. Mead is brought in in barrels and beer in great vats, from which other slaves fill and circulate beakers and drinking horns. When at last the curtain rises, all the assembled fall flat on the ground before the Emperor. In a single day, the loyal sentiments of as many as thirty thousand subjects have thus been fortified.

The most worried man in Abyssinia is the Master of Ceremonies, for thousands of high officials are held in suspense by the award of rank and orders. How far the Emperor's chest may be bared, on the other hand how short the robe of a dignitary may be, how many drums and trumpets a functionary may have to precede him in the street, that is, how loud he

may make his music, and how much softer that of the minor officials must be, who may wear trousers, like the Emperor's and who those like the ministers', who may carry a certain piece of metal on his sword-hilt, which favourites may use certain colours for their cloaks and sunshades, these are the problems which preoccupy the upper classes. Here is the source of power, for such tokens of honour are the outward and visible sign of all the joys of life.

In this pyramid, as in all pyramids, one stone bears on the others, and as the apex is a single emperor, and the base millions of slaves, the goal of all ambition is to reach the highest of the intervening courses. And even when the Emperor, at the apex, strives for justice, he cannot survey his country, the mountains stand higher than the pyramid, and the depredations of the mighty in the towns and villages of the highland valleys, on the rivers and on the pastures, and the medieval methods used by chiefs, nobles, and priests to feed on the subjects—such things have never been thoroughly investigated by a white man. As the pay of the functionaries and officers is non-existent or derisory, they prey on the people, whom they despise as the people despise a poor officer or priest. It is told of a dying Ras that his last order was: "Bury me with one arm out of the grave, so that I may still collect taxes."

Who could feel any inducement to work in a land where nobody can save unless he is in government employment? Since everything, as in Faust, belongs to the Emperor, since he only bestows land on his favourites in order to extort high taxes from them, which can only be wrung from the poorly tilled land by robbery and slave-dealing, in the end no rich man works: only the Mohammedan merchants, who are more cunning than the Christians, make a profit on the goods which the Emperor exports, ivory, coffee, wax,

hides, to the value of thirty million dollars, not counting the gold.

The coin which is known and current everywhere, however, is not of gold: it is a large silver dollar bearing the effigy of a distant princess, of whose life not even a legend has penetrated to Abyssinia. A hundred and fifty years ago, the Maria Theresa dollar was introduced into the country by the traders of the Austrian Levant, and has been minted ever since. Yet those who know the country make it dirty before tendering it, for if it shines the natives refuse it. Baker ascribed the popularity of the silver empress to her *décolleté*.

The manners and customs current among the heathen negroes in Uganda before they so much as saw a white man are still lacking in Abyssinia, which has been in touch with civilization for hundreds of years. It is not only that the people tear their meat raw with their teeth, differing only from the leopards by cutting off the piece between their teeth with their knives: even the rich, wallowing in gold necklaces and feathers, in spite of their contact with Europe, seldom think of teaching their children more than writing; the geography and history, the flora and fauna of their own country are almost unknown. The skilful crafts of the negroes, especially in the west of Africa, are here conspicuous by their absence. Even their music is confined to the monotonous chanting in the churches and to drums and trumpets, and there are no national dances. Dolls, the playthings of all the negro tribes, are unknown: draughts and a kind of hockey are known.

IX

How is this possible? A people, thousands of whom make the yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem, still lives in huts of logs,

brushwood, cow-dung, and grass, and often with the cattle in the same room, a thing few negroes would tolerate: though the capital is in daily telegraphic communication with Europe, save for the one railway line, no passable road leads to the sea: though iron and marble grow out of the ground, they have no idea of felling trees, but burn them through close to the ground. It may be objected that these conditions of life are medieval, but why should they be so? Civilization and Christianity came to Abyssinia much earlier than to France, and yet barely eighty years ago, at the time of the English expedition, they invented a new way of killing an enemy, namely, by binding him and driving great nails into his chest. Here, as elsewhere, it must lie in the character of the people, and that character was formed, in this natural stronghold, by rain and wind, by mountains and rivers.

This wild mountain country, whose roads turn into rivers every summer, governed by nobles protected by armies of slaves, and always at war with each other, could not but remain alien to culture, whether of the land or the mind. The peasant, not knowing who will invade his land to-morrow, tills his field perfunctorily, and prefers to seek out one of those rocky fastnesses with which the extinct volcanoes of Abyssinia still protect its people. Courage and cruelty have issued from this Alpine fortress, with a rude form of Christianity for their background.

The scars of many burns show how they steel their children's courage: the hero is he who can hold a burning straw or stick in his naked hand the longest. Tapeworm, which has become a national pest owing to the eating of raw meat and the dirt, is so popular that in many tribes it is considered a scandal never to have had one. The negro, too, dreads sickness, but no negro tribe has ever been known to do what Abyssinian tribes do, namely, to set fire to a house where

the inmates have been stricken with smallpox, with the sick in it, driving them back with their spears if they try to escape. The negro, too, hangs his dead enemy's skull in the market-place, but the custom of carrying the genitals of the murdered man on the belt like a cartridge-box, is an original, if simplified form of sterilization. Even the white Christian slaughters oxen, but he does not go so far as to set them with their heads towards Jerusalem, crying, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

The negro, too, eats raw meat, but only the Massai know the most cruel of all Abyssinian customs: at a feast the ox is led into the hall, and pieces are cut out of the living animal while the arteries of the head are skilfully avoided, so that the bellowing creature slowly bleeds to death under the eyes of the feasters. This custom, although attempts have been made to deny it, has existed for centuries, exists to-day, and is vouched for by all explorers and travellers. Which is the more cannibal meal—a dead enemy or a living ox?

Superstition, under which cruel characters are apt to conceal their fears, come to swell the confusion of feelings. But they have fine gestures: ceremonial forms are always to be found among cruel men, who find a compensation for moral acts in aesthetic arabesques, and thus seek to restore the order they destroy. At night the Abyssinians roll themselves up to the chin in sheets: a married couple, rolled up together in a kind of bale, look like mummies. For they show respect by exposing their skin, and when two Abyssinians meet, and dismount from their mules preparatory to the gesture of ceremony, they raise the tip of their toga-like robe from their breast, and the higher they raise it, the greater the honour.

Marriage is a sacrament, which each man shares with as many wives as he feels like, but, in contrast to the Emperor, all the children of the ordinary man are legitimate, and any

woman suing for maintenance wins her case. And in the midst of their medieval customs, they have a very modern institution—trial-marriage, with the motto: "See if she bears children." For their first marriage, which takes place in their eleventh to their fourteenth year, the girls are bound by their parents' will; afterwards, they are free to choose, and if a rich girl cannot find a husband, she keeps a lover, whom she pays and treats like a servant, calling him "wotbiet," that is, "cook," who must live close by her and be faithful, while she is free.

The betrothed may not visit his future bride, and, if he enters the house, she must beat a horrified retreat, but she can receive other young men alone. The kiss is unknown in Abyssinia: instead, they rub the right nostril of the other with their index finger. The woman is bought as among the negroes, and, as among the whites, married with great feasting and drinking: there is even a "great glutton" invited too, who, before the eyes of all, must drink anything up to three gallons, and eat a corresponding amount. The beer, which resembles the mead of the Germanic tribes, is not, as there, glorified with the names of eagles, lions and kings, but is called Galla beer, the "drink of slaves."

The priest, who is of no importance in the ordinary marriage ceremony, comes into his own at a birth: all other men shun the house of the woman in labour, and run away from the pursuing laughter and shrieks of the young mother's friends. The man is only allowed to stick his lance through the door to make the new-born brave by the touch. The conviction, astonishing among Christians, of the uncleanness of women, is also shown by the fact that the women are forbidden to bake the communion bread. The woman addresses the man with the formal "you," he calls her "thou." Marriage is dissolved as quickly as it is concluded. The man sells his

wife, the brother his sister in order to get money. She pays them back by doing what she likes.

X

It was Noah's fault. Probably he was drunk again when he cursed his son Ham, condemning him to serve his brother, and thus vindicating all slave-dealers for all time. He did not know what he was doing, for Ham was no worse than Shem, and the anti-Hamitic struggle as foolish as the anti-Semitic. But the Jews, despite all persecution, have nevertheless made better progress than such of Ham's posterity as were enslaved, or at least spent their lives as chattels, and have remained slaves to this very day. For the persecuted can struggle and conquer, his self-confidence grows with resistance, and even when he lies bound on the earth, his heart is swelling with the joy of the revenge to come. But when he loses his freedom, the slave is deprived of the noble feeling of revenge: when the chain has been dragged from generation to generation, such feelings atrophy like an unused organ, and, in the course of generations, die out. The eyes of the captive lion still seem to hint that he feels the bars which separate him from an unknown freedom in the forests of his fathers: the slave feels them no longer.

This is probably the reason why seven thousand years of human history have so few slave revolts to record. For the history of the slave is longer than that of any other class except the priests, and in it the greatest philanthropists figure as slave-dealers: Solon the wise and Lycurgus the just. Caesar ruled an empire two-thirds of which consisted of slaves.

The Mohammedans were no better, but their argument is difficult to refute. Mohammed felt the inward contradiction

no less than Justinian not long before him, but ventured as little as he to shake the foundations of the national economy and only prescribed lenient treatment of the slaves. He subjugated the infidels instead of converting them, and to this very day, in slave-owning countries, the Mohammedans take good care not to convert the negro, for only because and so long as he is an infidel can he be a slave. Fellow-feeling is no tenet of that creed: no one claims that all men are equal. Allah is great, therefore let us sell the unbelievers into exile! The leniency recommended by a legislator in the application of his Draconian laws has never been practised by his successors.

Slavery under the All-Christian King of Spain, which lasted in his country till the sixteenth century, and the cant with which it was surrounded, showed how much farther this religion had moved from its founder than that of Mohammed. When the Portuguese, even before Columbus, began to enslave negroes on the west coast of Africa, soothing their conscience with the colour of their victims, when they began their man-hunts, and when they shipped thousands in pens to South America to mine the gold and reap the tropical fruits for them, they created an artificial migration of the peoples involving graver consequences than the natural one. Men went out of Africa, money came out of America, the planters grew rich, the negroes decayed.

As the Mohammedans had sold the Christians, the Christians now sold the heathens. A great Father of the Church called slave-dealing a work of piety because it gave those poor pagans the unexpected chance of becoming Christians. Popes declared it a necessity and held thanksgiving services. Then England, by convention, supplied slaves to America, and even though the first Quakers were Englishmen, America must always bear the credit of having roused the world.

Clarkson roused the English, but throughout the nineteenth century, the Christian capitalists made use of their Mohammedan colleagues to deal in men, and about 1900, the products of certain negro states are quoted in school textbooks as: "Ivory, ostrich feathers and slaves." All men in Abyssinia not wearing the monk's cowl or carrying the sword are slaves.

As Abyssinia, since the eighth century, had been surrounded by Mohammedans who, in their conquests, had taken Christian slaves, the Christians can hardly be blamed for doing the same when they came into power. They would have had to be better than their white brothers to act otherwise. That went on for a thousand years. About 1850, missionaries described how Portuguese Christian slave-dealers, under their very eyes, laid waste ten villages and slaughtered fifteen hundred men in order to capture fifty-two women. The price of a handsome Galla girl in the northern market stood between twenty-five and forty dollars.

As long as they could, certain scholars tried to defend this trade in theory, proving that there was nothing against slavery in the New Testament, and declaring that the principle of the equality of all men in the eyes of God was only a "qualification." The moral impetus of the French Revolution, which attempted to put that principle into political practice, was as ineffective as the work of the Quakers in putting an end to slave-dealing: the end was not to come till the triumph of the machine, which laid so many human hands idle, reduced the price of men, and then only of certain male slaves. When, with the falling price of slaves, moral indignation grew cheaper too, it was used by white capital, which never ventures into the rain without a moral raincoat, to draw a distinction between slave-owning and slave-dealing, so that it might indignantly condemn the former, which brings in no profits, while carrying on the latter. How should the

Abyssinians, whom it is the duty of their brothers in Christ to supply with European civilization, acquire it save with ivory and human souls? The term "black ivory" seems only to have been coined last century. Man-hunts, in comparison with the sixteenth century, have been restricted, but never abolished. Such a solution consorts well with the pernicious notion that armaments can be reduced, while a new order can only begin when they are abolished. "They are under a spell," wrote Speke of the slaves, "and know as little of their strength as the domestic animals."

It was even proved by the white Christians how unhappy these poor, dependent creatures would be if they were suddenly emancipated, how the weight of responsibility would demoralize them, as they had never known anything of the kind. Captive animals which have been set free have returned to their cages, but their young, born in freedom, have never yet been seen to do so. An isolated example of kindness in a slave-dealer, which its defenders use to beautify the trade, proves as little as traits of generosity prove anything against the violence of a dictator. Certainly, there are many whose masters look after them better than free servants, for the latter represent no capital; thus, in many tribes of Abyssinia, it is considered unfair to sell a slave after long service, but the menace hovers over them perpetually.

In this respect, the Mohammedans are described as more generous than the Christians. Christian priests do not free their slaves, but the Mohammedans declare a slave woman free if she has borne her master a child. As the Koran prescribes not more than four wives, a master can in any case rarely marry the slave who has been his concubine. Sometimes, the slave is protected by the law: if his master knocks his eye out, he becomes free—a diabolical exchange, more frightful than the right to kill.

But what becomes of the emancipated slave? Forthwith, having got work perhaps as a sailor, he considers himself everybody's equal and calls the Africans savages. If he has earned or stolen money, he at once buys slaves, refuses to work and generally begins slave-dealing. As the master rarely liberates a slave from moral motives, but only out of vague fear, the result is immoral, for in the long run, the motives of human actions work themselves out in their consequences. Dissolute, lazy, and overbearing, the emancipated slave tries to conceal his past, and so destroys his future. If he is stranded, he returns to his master and embraces his knees. Neither the ancient crime of enslaving a man on account of his birth, nor the modern crime of depriving him of his civil rights on account of his birth or his faith, will be eradicated by leniency or exceptions, but only by the breaking of the spell.

XI

In the eighties, a cardinal moved through Europe, calling upon men to free the slaves. The lords of the world vied with each other in banquets and speeches, but hardly anything was done. At that time, slavery had only been abolished in America and Russia for twenty years, and the movement spread. That Christians were being made slaves in Abyssinia, not only in effect, but in form, troubled the administrators of the Pauline inheritance. Even the Archbishop and Emperor John had endeavoured to put a stop to slave-dealing, and when a French traveller told Emperor Menilek about the revolt of public opinion instigated by the cardinal, he took three days to think it over and then promulgated an edict against the Mohammedan dealers: moreover, every prisoner of war was to be set free at the end of seven years: later he showed

that a few thousand had been liberated. With great solemnity, he entered the Brussels anti-slavery convention which demanded in a hundred paragraphs precisely what some of its signatories were trying to evade.

But no more than a year after that edict, Menilek was again allowing his officers to keep slaves, and when he saw knowing officers having slaves "presented" to them, he himself accepted the same kind of presents from his officers. Moreover, as he had need of the Mohammedan merchants to sell gold and ivory, he closed an eye. And if "immorality" was going to go on in his empire, he wanted at least to have a share in it, and exacted two dollars tax for every slave sold. With this stroke of genius, he restored the harmony of his world.

It might be imagined that conditions would improve when the nations united in a league and hence founded a kind of moral police above the frontiers of race and creed. What did the League of Nations do?

On November 9, 1918, when the white flags were hoisted on all the battlefields of the world at the end of four years of war, Menilek's daughter, then Empress, fearing a turning point in the history of the world, signed an edict prohibiting slave-dealing. It was as powerless as the first. The natural fortress blocked the view of the authorities: in their solitary highland valleys, the chiefs laughed at a prohibition which curtailed their revenues, and the dealers found plenty of hidden paths, just like the smugglers in any mountain country.

But since slavery was not forbidden, but only slave-dealing, and this, without exception, led to Arabia, so that the goods had to cross the Red Sea, surely the white steamship lines and parts of all the fleets of Europe sailing past were stronger than those dark dealers, and should be able to catch them. What if a police force were established to watch two or three

of the slaving ports? Did not Lincoln, much earlier, have a much harder struggle in his own country? While the white men were doing nothing, the Empress learned from her envoys that she was not counted in the commonwealth of nations; the right thing for white powers was to be represented at Geneva. But even here, just in the same way as among the white tribes, trade was more important than civilization and religion, and as the Empress seemed disposed to abolish the slaves, she declared in her solemn application to Geneva that slave-dealing had already been abolished, while slavery would soon disappear, "save in case of war," which, however, can always be arranged in this country.

Instead of keeping Abyssinia out of the League until slavery was abolished, the diplomats sought for a formula under which it could be admitted. For eight years, from 1923 to 1931, experts were busy in meetings, commissions, reports, speeches, debates, articles, minutes, lunches, and banquets, trying to find the "formula." The Commission confirmed the Abyssinian statement that "where slavery exists, the slaves are in general not unhappy," in general, too, "they are not ill-treated." The Commission further admitted that the Government would run the gravest danger by abolition, as powerful chiefs could prevent it. A general emancipation would have "disastrous results." The very words of the Czar's ministers, of the Southern States, of the landholders, of the upholders of armament to-day. The Commission issued a warning against plunging Abyssinia into difficulties of a political, social, economic, and financial kind—the Commission indulges in stylistic opulence. "En attendant, on doit souhaiter que les puissances. . ."

The experts of the League did not venture to publish in its entirety the report submitted by their delegate, Lord

Lugard. The revelations contained in that report correspond to the observations of travellers and explorers, the imperial edicts for the liberation of the slaves stand on paper, the sale of many thousands of Abyssinian slaves is noted in that report of 1925 as being "of recent date," and the priests especially are held responsible. "We will die rather than give up our slaves," said one of the most influential chiefs to a traveller. In the capital, slave-dealing goes on under the very eyes of the white ambassadors, according to a French Government report, which points out with irony that two dealers were actually hanged. According to two recent British writers, the state of things since Menilek's death has been made worse by civil wars, and, judging from their accounts, there must be five million slaves in the country. After a lapse of ten years, one of these writers found whole districts, formerly flourishing, desolate because the inhabitants had been sold, and just when the Englishman was in the capital, the Emperor received "as a gift one hundred and forty boys and girls between six and fourteen years of age, as well as women with infants at their breast."

And the years pass, and not a country stirs a finger: one country only, and a small one, New Zealand, seeks to save its honour by energetic appeals. While nearly half the inhabitants of a country are forced into the position of old Egyptian slaves, receive every gift on their knees or lying prone, are not allowed to drink from a cup, but only from their hollowed hands, and are cast into chains at any attempt at flight, the descendant of Solomon, the Lord's anointed, like the sultan in Weber's *Oberon*, has his torches borne by slaves when he travels, and keeps a choir of eunuch boys. But the Commission of the League of Nations is of the opinion that the church "would have" to create the atmosphere, the clergy "would have" to liberate the slaves first. "The

Commission has considered whether warships have the right to investigate suspicious vessels. The Commission declines any competence to answer this delicate question, but expresses the burning wish that it may be inquired into.”

Confronted by such actions, the Abyssinian Government can see how seriously the white Christians take the matter, and amuses itself with a new law, by which anyone selling or giving a slave away shall be punished in the same way as a slave-dealer, that is, not at all, for no one punishes him. Yet meanwhile, so as to have something to show in Geneva, the Abyssinian delegate in 1930 submitted a document containing the names of 298 slaves who had been set free the year before. Five millions remained slaves.

Meanwhile, all the slave-markets have vanished. Slaves are not paid for, a gun or some cartridges are given in exchange, and the stranger is hoodwinked with the same graceful objections: it is mere consideration for the captives which prevents their liberation. In the whole country, agriculture would decline as it did in Cuba and Haiti, famine would invade the land, as it did in Eritrea when Italy liberated the Egyptian slaves there. Nobody reflects that the famine would soon be over, while slavery dooms generations for centuries. Nobody admits that the Emperor does not pay his officials and soldiers, and that taxes can be paid in slaves, which comes cheaper as long as they are allowed to breed properly. Nobody explains that the Junker makes war and goes hunting because he has learned nothing else, whether he be brown, white, or yellow.

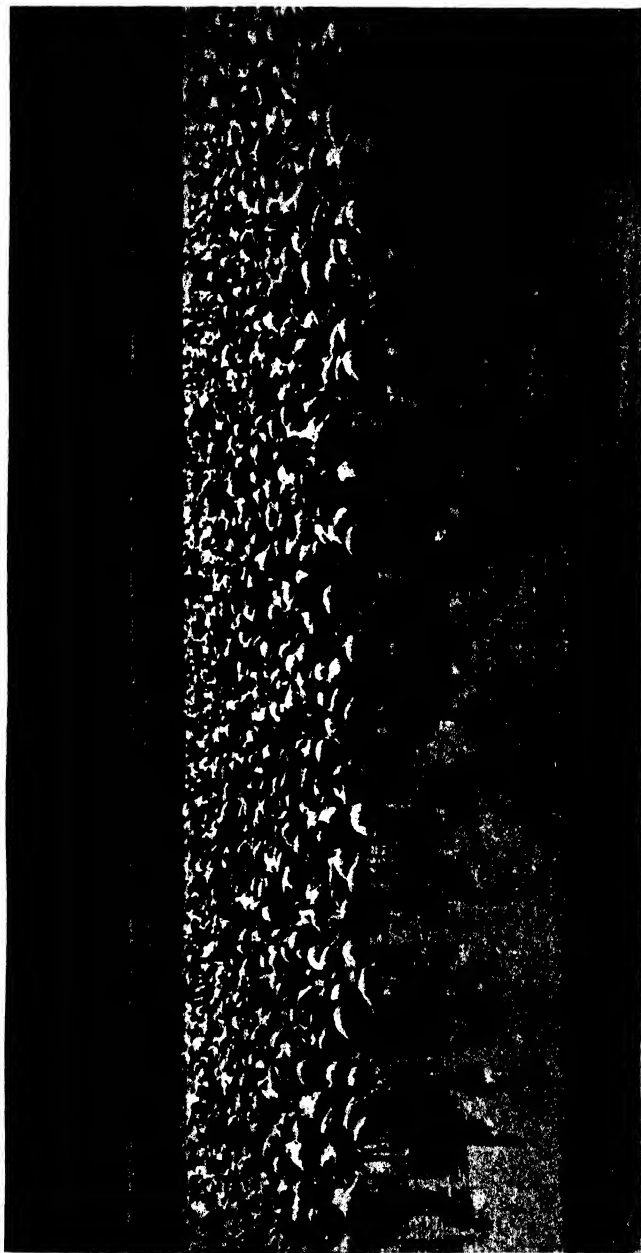
In the Red Sea, where fashionable steamers pass nearly every day, with the ladies refreshing themselves, after their strenuous day, in the faint evening breeze on the upper deck, on the latitude of Jidda, white sails glide through the hot gloom and the officers on the bridge follow them through

their glasses, grin perhaps, then look ahead again, for that does not concern them. When an English man-of-war once pursued such a boat, the captain threw all the slaves overboard, thus forcing the English to rescue them, while he made away. Later, after telling his story, he asked: "Why do the *chawadja* (foreigners) love the slaves so much that, to save a dozen, they let a fine *zaruk* (sailing-boat) like mine slip through their fingers?"

Others anchor their boats on one of the rocky islands in the Red Sea, and hand over their wares to another, which carries them to the Hedjaz, for in Jidda there are no human markets to-day, in Mecca there are, and hundreds are smuggled over to Mecca as pilgrims. The League of Nations knows all about it; excellent French reports appeared in 1930, all the authorities know, the consuls on the coast know the names of the dealers, and even if they get no money, there are middlemen everywhere who have plenty of money to spend, for a fine boy of twelve or a girl of fourteen brings in as much as £120, and a pregnant woman, who can regain her beauty, comes even cheaper, for the child is thrown in.

The markets which, until 1913, were held publicly in the capital, have been replaced by depots, especially in the Harrar province, which is particularly subject to the Emperor. There whole villages live on hush money, for which they haggle with the leaders of the caravans, every house is a hiding-place, for the only dangerous time is that between the capture and the desert. There the captives sleep in ditches, which are covered over, till the migration to the sea begins. On these desert roads, to-day as long ago, lie corpses of human beings who have fallen exhausted by the way: others, that is, more than half, succumb still earlier to the effects of mutilation, which is carried out without doctors or sanitary measures.

The great raids made by Abyssinian slave-owners and



TRAVELLERS



Lehmert & Landrock

RHINOCEROS

dealers to the west and south of their country, into Kenya and the Soudan are reported by the British authorities, who cannot always beat them off. These raids seem the more justifiable to the Abyssinians in that they only try to make up by them for the flight of slaves over the border, since neither the Italian nor the English Government gives them back. The British officers in Gedaref, eighty miles west of the frontier, take the fugitives in, give them work, and find the women suitable husbands.

But the slave-owners on the other side of the border feel themselves wrongfully robbed, and when a rich man sends a messenger across the frontier begging for the return of his escaped property, his letter to the British officer at the frontier begins: "May God grant that thou shalt know the blessings of justice. The protector of the poor and their property is the government. It is a fact that all the slaves of our district have run away to Gedaref. That is the way we poor men are oppressed, for it is hard for us to work without slaves. Therefore I am sending my son, that you may help him in this matter. A thousand thanks."

XII

The Blue Nile has reached the Soudanese plain and is striving in a north-westerly direction towards an unknown goal. The adventures of the canyon over, no longer protected by rocks and forests, gliding through the dully glowing plain, its course has quietened, yet it is still young enough to suffer no boats. Not until Roseires, four hundred miles from its mouth, has it grown too broad and deep to defend itself. A white steamer mounts it, and the untameable, wild Nile must perforce bear a burden. Yet even now its swift current and dark colour,

above all, the silt it carries with it, distinguish it from the character of its graver brother, although, by their breadth, a certain resemblance begins in their outward appearance.

An evergreen park fringes the broad stream, and the formative hand of the English has very little to check, but the motor road on its left bank shows what kind of a land it has entered. The fortress-like building of Singa passes by, and the two guns in front of it tell of what happened there not long since: villages in well-kept enclosures succeed each other, half hidden by the natural park on the banks, or standing in the open dhurra fields. Here peace, or at least quiet, reigns. Life is governed by a new phenomenon, which lies downstream.

For now the Blue Nile encounters the same thing as the White Nile encountered above Khartoum. Its breathing grows laboured, then stops. With terror, it feels widened, an invisible obstacle is damming it up. Suddenly it runs against a wall built athwart its course ninety feet high and over a mile long. For unknown reasons, invisible hands have stopped its career, only letting it foam on through stone gates, which sometimes open and sometimes shut. It is the dam of Sennar, gripping and regulating it. A frightful experience! The splendid horse, galloping in freedom, suddenly feels the rope round its neck: then comes the trainer to force it into fixed movements at fixed times. The surprise is so great that even the steamer cannot go farther, for the dam has no lock and another steamer has to wait on the other side.

Soon, on the right bank, two great tributaries discharge.

The Rahad and Dinder have been true brothers their life long. They rose close to each other in the same high plateau west of Lake Tana, they were fed by the same network of a hundred rivulets, have flowed in the same direction, first north-west, then parallel to the Blue Nile, they are of about

the same length and the same volume. The only difference is that the Rahad in its deep bed runs through richer mud than the broader and longer Dinder. Both reach the Nile in summer, while a third, still farther to the north, sometime shares the fate of the Atbara.

The Atbara, too, rises in Lake Tana, close to the two tributaries of the Blue Nile. A little, wild mountain torrent, it is at first clear, dashing and free. Here is a being which is completely transformed in later life by the influence of its subject brothers; the great quantities of silt which then determine its career are brought to it only by its three tributaries. The longest of them rises in a volcanic hot spring to the east of the lake, the two others plunge to meet it from the mighty veins of the western Alps: then the Arabs can call it in all truth Atbara, which means "the black." It is especially on the lower reaches of this and the two tributaries of the Blue Nile that the nomads live, and are taken so fearfully by surprise when the flood descends.

For in January, the Atbara is helpless and dry. All it carries with it evaporates, the desert swallows the river. Fifty miles above the Nile it is a dry bed of stones and mud. One of the few rivers of the earth which so silt up that they cannot discharge, it looks at times like a man subject to fits of madness, whom his family leaves behind till he comes to himself. But then it hurls itself with furious energy on its more constant brother, bringing it more help in the three months of its real life than others throughout the year. Two hundred miles below the Blue Nile, the Atbara discharges, as long as it discharges at all, in the middle of the desert into the united Nile.

By that time, both Niles have passed through many an adventure. The Blue Nile quickly overcomes the crisis of the dam. It certainly feels that part of its water flows off in un-

known channels, but soon it has grown broad and deep again, flowing on steadily between firm banks, calmer, yet with a lively pulse, and not even at the end relapsing into the sluggish habit of the White, even though, in this plain, the gradient is very slight. Throughout its lower course, from the dam onward, the Blue Nile sees and hears on its left bank the railway carrying off the cotton.

Then the towers which astonished the graver brother rise before it at the same distance. But the Blue Nile feels no hindrance, no check, for it is itself the one that hinders and checks. In wide enclosures the cattle graze day and night, and the light wooden fences show that the nomads have been left behind. From the desert plain rise a few tiled houses, with young trees protected by wooden palings against the goats, then come the white posts of football fields, a pergola with palm trunks for pillars—all signs of a town, things which the nomad, the child of nature, when he first approaches the capital, can understand as little as the Blue Nile flowing into the desert from the forests of its home.

Shortly before Khartoum, a great railway bridge with huge piles and arches stands waiting, and over it the railway runs to the capital. The green mantle which the stream has worn spreads out into an evergreen town with white houses, some of which are palaces. Some stand in the shadow of phoenix palms, in whose tops the great ospreys nest. From the midst of the plain rises the splendid town.

Having left the bridge behind, it sees on its left bank a castle with guns and troops in bright-coloured uniforms, looking like the guard of honour of some great lord. Fine boats, and splendid horses with brilliant carriages stand at the gate, and when, not far away, the great doors are opened, a few hundred brown youths come trooping out to enjoy themselves on the palm-grown beach. This is the residence

of the British governor, and the college in which three hundred Nubians are educated. A mile farther on, and the second giant bridge appears, with the startled, grave, broad White Nile below it.

Now, just before the end, does the Blue Nile, bold and childlike, suddenly realize with terror that it is itself only part of a greater whole? Does the pale, slow stream appear as a tributary which it must receive for good or ill? Neither betrays a trace of such rivalry.

These are two brothers, embracing, neither superior, neither subject to the other. In this embrace, the river is doubled. It is as though it must gather up all its strength to face the second half of its life. From now on there is only one Nile.

Now comes the struggle with man.

BOOK THREE

THE STRUGGLE WITH MAN

AN aeroplane hovering over a camel-rider: that is the design on the Soudanese postage-stamps. If this rider were to set off on the left bank of the Nile, slightly to the west of Lake No, he could ride across twenty degrees of latitude—that is, about fifteen hundred miles—as the crow flies to Khartoum without crossing so much as a brook. On the right bank, from the mouth of the Atbara, riding in a straight line towards the mouth of the Nile, he would meet neither rivers nor rain. This waterless stretch of twelve degrees of latitude extends across the continent to the west coast over nearly fifty degrees of longitude. It is the Sahara, and even though it goes by another name east of the Nile, it is still the same desert.

Yet at this very part, where no mountains can check it, the Nile leaves its destined north-south course, and, for the first time in its life, describes a great loop. While railway and aeroplane, and even the camel-rider, cut off this loop by a straight line through the desert, the river, feeling some obstacle in its way, paints a gigantic S in the ochre-yellow sand of the Soudan.

If it perished of thirst, if it dried up, who could wonder? Imagine a solitary man, riding through a desert, without vegetation, half as big as Europe, with neither brother nor friend to bring him water, exposed day after day to a glare which only night mitigates, imagine this rider, anxiously hurrying to reach the sea, his home, and the ports, suddenly stopped by granite bars and forced to make a detour hundreds of miles long, will he and his failing camel not collapse before the goal is reached? But the Nile has streamed for centuries through the desert glare to the sea, helped by no

friend and no brother, such as brought it water in its youth: stopped by granite bars, it flows round them, wins from them defiance and daring, quickens by their contact its flagging flow, carries boats, struggles with the boats on its back, struggles with the men who fain would shackle it, and do shackle it, yet neither loses heart nor runs dry. The Nile forces its way through the infinite sand, as once it overcame the swamps; it bids defiance to the curse of the drought, as once it bade defiance to the greed of the lagoons, for both seek to suck up its substance, and thus actually reaches the country which it has watered and created by its flow since the beginning of time, reaches the delta and the ports, reaches the sea, the primeval home of the rivers. What a river!

The element with which the Nile takes up this new struggle is neither tableland nor mountain: it is an infinite rolling expanse, where sandy plains rise into glowing hills of stone, where whirlwinds burrow holes, where pyramids and boulders, apparently created out of nothing, with their wind-whetted edges, crumbling recesses and battered arches betray the wind as the fanatical creator of their amazing forms. And just as, in unfathomable characters, a female element mingles with the male, the desert shows, in the churned expanse, where the camel sinks in up to its knees, hard hills of quartz, on whose sharp edges it loses its footing. The desert has often been compared with the sea, but only a sudden spell could make the ever-moving element like the dead desert. In the sea lives that strange, other world of plants and creatures, whose depths only the eye of the diver can penetrate. In the sea, everything is movement, change, anarchy of forms: in the desert everything is rigid, for when the sand storms over the dead land, its motionless forms rise again when the storm has passed.

The only common term between sea and desert is their

unreality, and it reappears a third time in sight of the glaciers. Man, accustomed to the steadiness of life about him, is startled in the presence of the elemental, and can no longer feel that sea or desert, or even the glacier, is really alive. What weighs on common humanity, simplicity instead of diversity, the bare intercourse of sky and water, sky and sand, sky and ice, sets the inhabitants of these three regions apart from all others and makes them all alike: all of them are silent and devout.

And are they mute? The mountaineer follows the whistle of the marmot up to the highest crags, and over desert and sea alike rises the cry of some bird of prey, wheeling over a fish in the water, a carrion in the sand, and screaming perhaps only to feel that it is alive. But through all three, the voice of the storm moves shrieking, and it is that voice that strikes terror to the heart of the boldest on glacier, sea, or desert.

How manifold is the desert! From rocky labyrinths rise mountains of granite and porphyry over six thousand feet in height; they are said to have been formed by the collapse of the rift at the Red Sea. Black rocks are immediately succeeded by light ones, and when fragments are struck off by the hammer, the marble inside is as white as Carrara's, or veined in red or black. Even into the Libyan desert, to the west of the Nile, long dry valleys run, stretches of fissured rock called *wadis*, looking like rivers petrified by a curse: rivers which may have flowed to the Nile at the places where these menacing valleys descend to it to-day. The light varies like the forms, though no clouds shadow it: on misty days the sun hangs pale blue over the yellow sea. Then the Bedouins sing songs which liken the sun to the moon. Sometimes that is a premonition of the storm.

Suddenly the bright glare of day is darkened: a dull yellow glare suffuses the air, mighty brown mountains, like a palpable chain, roll through the air: no wind, heavy silence, the gross

darkness of the Bible. The sinister cloud approaches, a voice with it, rolling in the distance. When the storm breaks, blustering, smoking, breathing heat, carrying grains of sand and stones with it, men and beasts cast themselves on the ground, for it strikes and kills them. Tents are overturned, the dry ropes break, and nobody notices: all creatures tremble, cast to earth by the weight of the dark, devouring storm, and when the wind-god surveys the earth, he thinks perhaps that a terrified congregation of men is lying before him in prostrate supplication. At such moments, what good is it to the white scientist that, in his tranquil Oxford study, he explained the south-west storm by the clash of the cold clouds with the overheated desert? In his deadly fear, must he, too, not think of the Djinn, the evil spirit of the Arabs, which they dread as the creator of these rolling pillars of sand?

Often the storm subsides as quickly as it burst, and when men and beasts, their lives spared, stand up half stunned, some dead bird, a bunting perhaps, lies on the earth, for a few birds venture into this arid world, and when the pale-grey desert-lark has found a refuge in the fold of a tent, it rises singing. Nothing is more moving in the desert than the trill of the lark who—Allah alone knows what she lives on—has ventured far from the oasis, like the gulls still following the ship though land is days behind.

Still more unreal than the wind in the desert is the water. Capriciously, without apparent cause or consequences, as sudden as comets, the springs bring life into the rigid desert landscape, creating mild green spots, infinitely small, rising like points of rest in this formless, flattened waste. There are, it is true, ancient roads, on which the caravans move from spring to spring, but out of the whole, the springs break forth as freakishly as the submarine currents in the sea, as the

crevasses in the glaciers, and shift as they do. From the depths of the deepest valleys, as from the depths of the deepest hours of human life, rises the life-saving water, and forthwith the land around turns green, a few thorny acacias, a parched palm appear, like a gift of the gods, men and beasts fling themselves to the earth to drink the great elixir which saves them from the burning sun. El Bahr!

Or again, life and soul have been parched for days by a gentle, glowing wind: the wood of the tent-poles warps, the ivory knife-handle splits, the roll of paper cracks, the rug sticks to the blanket, the woollen shirt crackles as it is unfolded, electric sparks fly from the hair under the comb. Then a group of acacias, which has appeared and disappeared for hours past, promises water—no, there is no oasis, and no spring to quench the thirst of the exhausted traveller. Yet they hurry to dig the subterranean water with their last strength, for it must be there to nourish the tree. As the spades crunch through the sand, the naked tree crackles above: it is the dried resin on its branches.

But how is this water to be preserved? To keep himself alive, the Bedouin has invented slightly porous earthenware pitchers, more precious than a vacuum flask: the luke-warm water turns cold in them, at night it becomes icy. If the pores of the pitcher are clogged, terror stares him and the white traveller in the face. Perhaps he has packed lemons in tin boxes to keep them juicy. Then he takes out his last, counts out the segments by his watch, if it is not sanded up, and sucks a segment every half-hour. In that way he may be able to struggle on to the next oasis, but one of the camels, who have to look after themselves, has fallen after all, and the scream of the vulture tells that within an hour it will be no more than bones.

Like milestones, the skeletons of dead camels mark the desert road, often six or eight to the mile. Their bones,

bleached to a shadow, quickly cleaned of flesh by sun and vultures alike, are the cleanliest remains of organic life, and, if they stood upright, would look like some carefully prepared model in a museum. Lying there, its outline still complete, in its ghostly, airy shape, with its visible ribs, it might be the Platonic idea of a camel. But even the bones are consumed to powder by the burning sun and turn into desert sand. The way of all flesh, dust to dust.

And the wind of the ages blows over it and the sand of the ages covers up all tracks, from the governors of the Pharaohs to the British conquerors, from the worshippers of the sun to the faithful of both Mediterranean prophets, an endless train of men who have thirsted to death, whose bones have been bleached by the relentless blue of this cynically smiling sky, ground by the wind, turned into dust by the power of the sun, reduced to orange-yellow desert sand, through which the descendant of those sons of the desert rides on his camel, not knowing whether he will reach the end, the prairie, and the river.

How manifold are the gods upon whose names men have called in supplication in the whirlwind! When the aborigines crossed the desert, to bring tidings from the prairie, or to drive a herd of cattle to the river, ignorant of foreign conquerors or priests, they worshipped the heavenly bodies by whose course they reckoned their road: no one knows how many, asleep on their beasts, lost their bearings and their way and, with their animals, turned into white bones for the wind to mingle with the sand. But when the conquering prophets of new doctrines invaded the prairies from the Red Sea, and the Bedouins turned first Greek, then Christian, then Mohammedan, there arose to heaven a strange confusion of names, Hercules and Pan, Isis, Jesus, and Ares. To this day, in their inmost hearts, they have remained star-worshippers.

Arab writers tell a strange tale, that the sons of desert and prairie believed in an immortal god, but they believed too in one who was mortal, and who had no name.

When the slaves of gold-hunting Egyptian kings, whose discoveries are recorded on their tombs, moved through the hills of this desert, great armies with their slaves, generals with their men perished in whirlwinds, and the vultures made but one carrion of them. The temple of Thebes has preserved only the name of some king's son, of some great potentate who, in his last agony, may well have cursed his greed of power. Once Greeks came down, sent by Cambyzes, but none followed them, and they left behind on the Nile only the tale that none of them returned. Sand and sun have even hidden from history the last traces of that insolent inroad, and there is not even a monument or a statue round which legend could grow into poetry. Like the bones, the names fell away to dust, so great is the power of the desert.

II

In the steppe-lands, all the shapes are softer, granite and basalt rise more rarely, colours and lines look gentler, but the thorny, transparent, outline of the leafless acacia, which dominates the whole, lends the parched yellow expanse a ghostly appearance, such as a dry cactus has in its small way. In this belt between the rainless desert and the region of the tropical rains, up-Nile from about Dongola to Malakal, that is from the fourth cataract to the beginning of the swamps, in this bushland which goes by different names according to the varying degrees of visibility, the nomad prays fervently to the rain which, like the desert sun, destroys him if he goes to his flocks under cloud-bursts. But in two days it creates the

miracle of the grass, on which his flocks live, with the same magic swiftness with which it can vanish in a few hours. The very grass which threatened to choke the life out of the Nile in the swamps becomes, not far away, on both sides of the river, the greatest blessing for man and beast. After a few hours of rain, tiny feathery leaves can be seen unfolding on the acacia: the camel stands waiting for them, millions of little organisms come to birth, and all life feels that it has been saved from death by thirst. Within a week, a thousand dry branches have swelled anew, the humps of the camel distend, for the yellow plain has turned green.

Yet forthwith it arms itself afresh: the ripened grass pricks, cuts, tears cloth and leather, a green world begotten by water draws red blood from every traveller, and while the herds grow fat, the explorer waits impatiently for the moment when the nomad burns the bush to destroy by fire what he had so fervently prayed for from the water. Thus the elements alternate and rage against each other in lands where the even measure of sun and rain must yield to the exorbitance of both, like the ecstasies of joy and suffering in which monomaniac men consume themselves.

In the rainy season, the cereal, the dhurra, has sprung up on the plain, the doum palm has grown green, soon it bears fruit, and when the sudden sun destroys the corn, the nomads grind the palm-nuts, making their flour from the fruits of the tallest trees. All this takes place in the hundred gradations by which the so-called bush-zone links the steppe to the desert.

Now the elephantine baobab gains an importance unforeseen at the Creation: the giant tree, more like a giant mushroom with its dome and spongy wood, is used as a barrel after the rainy season. The soft wood of the trunk, which branches out quite low, can be easily hollowed out and made impervious in the middle, and, with its diameter of forty-five feet

can hold anything up to two thousand gallons of water. If only a thin rind is left, the tree grows and greens again. Some botanists assert that a tree of this kind has five thousand years on its head. In the Nile bushland, the botanists are bolder than the historians.

Under the ghostly void of the transparent acacia, the browsing camel appears: it is incomprehensible that the huge creature can be satisfied with such thorns and tiny leaves. Though it is considered frugal, it is not humble, and though it is praised for its endurance, it is vicious and cowardly. It certainly serves man, but it neither loves nor knows him: stupid and defiant, it is terrible in rut, and seems to feel affection only for its young. Its strange and monstrous shape, for which it seems to have taken the giraffe's neck, the pig's head, and the cow's tail, contributing only its grotesque hump on its own account, makes it look like the embodiment of loneliness among the animals. It first came to Egypt in Roman times, when sheep and goats, cattle and horses had lived there for thousands of years.

No other animal knows such tragi-comic moments. When, after much shouting and beating, it kneels for the load, it holds up its hind legs in three parts, like a mechanical toy. When the camel walks, it swings along with an ambling motion that makes riding difficult. When it gallops it shakes its rider, because its hind foot strikes the ground a quarter of a second before the fore foot. The strongest species can carry seven hundredweight, and the quickest can cover a hundred miles in twenty-four hours, but not one is as trustworthy as a broken horse. It flies without warning into frenzies of rage, bites everybody, even its master, is thrown into panic by the remote howl of a hyena, and in its rage blows a great bubble out of its mouth like the soul which the old artists painted flying from the mouths of the dying.

Its whole life long it is a beast of burden, even on its day of triumph. Then it carries the bride and hundredweight-heavy trappings of brown leather, shells, and little bells. Perhaps one of those clean skeletons bleaching in the desert sand once moved in rich array through the streets of Khartoum to the wedding of a princess.

In pace it is beaten only by the ostrich, whose Latin name betrays its kinship with the camel. The camel is akin to the ostrich not only by its long legs and ugly action, but by its stupid expression. With its scraggy neck and crazy-looking head, it reminds one of some deranged idealist, running away as soon as the world runs counter to his dreams.

Once the ostrich could fly. But, the negroes say, one day when he was preparing with a bustard for his bath in the Nile next morning, he forgot to add "Inshallah—if God will." The next morning, as he was flying towards the sun, Allah punished him for his presumption by singeing his wings so that he fell dead to earth. Since then, the idealistic ostrich has flown no more.

But Allah has not protected the ostrich from the Bedouins. They catch this fleetest of creatures by pursuing it on horseback, two at a time, taking it in turns, with camels bringing water in the rear, and at last, when the hunted creature flags, they stun it with blows on the head. Then they cut its throat. But why? It has little flesh: any gazelle, which is easy to shoot, has more. But it carries white feathers on its body, ten or fourteen of them, which the wives of the white pashas love to carry as fans. Certainly the feathers grow better in captivity, like the voices of some birds and poets. But if they are hunted wild, their feathers must not be stained with blood: death, as in patriotic songs, must not be made visible, therefore the hunters quickly ram the big toenail of an ostrich foot into the wound. Now the swiftest runner in

the world lies dead in the sand so that some lady in St. Moritz may flaunt a feather fan. An ostrich has fallen for the sake of a goose.

It is still more useless to hunt the giraffe, the most picturesque of all the bush creatures, for it is dangerous to nobody and has not even a hunting trophy to bequeath. A creature without enemies! For as their sight, hearing, and sense of smell are equally keen, and as they are several feet taller than all other animals, even than the elephant, they move about in celestial herds, browsing on the leaves and tenderest twigs of the highest trees, always on the lookout, yet not really timid, with the composure of very tall men who look away over the heads of the rest.

Hence their childlike ways. When two giraffes affectionately lay their necks together, and stroke each other, it looks as if a giant toy had come to life. When they raise their heads and run, they are a miracle of grace: but when they droop their heads, they look as pedantic as professors of philosophy. As they can see everything, they are incorrigibly inquisitive to discover the cause of every noise and run into danger by their curiosity. Slow, without ambling, their action looks awkward: running more swiftly than all other animals except the ostrich, they are doubly amazing because they never gallop like the other animals of the bush. As their forelegs grow up to more than six feet, a man could walk under them with head erect, provided he were not a Dinka.

But how is an animal sixteen feet high to drink from the river? The giraffe can only approach the Nile with legs asplay, and while all the other animals merely bend their heads, it has to perform the comic turn of the snake-man in the circus. Therefore, in the rainy season, it prefers to lick the damp leaves at the top of trees. Considering the superiority of its physique, nobody can blame the giraffe for not wasting

its time with the white men, and yet there is one product of civilization which fascinates it. A few years ago, a new animal made its appearance in the bush, running more swiftly than all the others, more swiftly than the giraffe itself. It had four round legs, and in other ways was not a proper animal. If the giraffe spies a car, it runs up and races it to see which can go faster, and if, by the end of half an hour, motorized man has won, can it be regarded as a triumph?

But the real life of the steppe does not come from the three running animals, but from the bounding game. There are thousands of creatures who, in utter freedom and fearless of each other, leap before the eyes of the rider in the bush, and as the plain is boundless, the number of moving specks on the horizon is countless.

If, in the invisible distance, a lion approaches, the rider can detect it miles away by the change in the direction and speed of a thousand bounding creatures, all of whom, led by a leader or their own instinct, rush off in a remote, wild gallop, looking, at this incalculable distance, like rows of fleeing horses. Among the running ostriches and giraffes, antelopes vault over the parched yellow grass, no one knows whither, no one knows where they will take refuge from the invisible pursuer. A hundred shades of brown and white, striped, speckled, spotted, crowned with horns so various that an artist might have sketched them on one of his good days, the ariel and the dama, to mention only two of the prettiest names, great waterbucks, little reedbucks, dainty bushbucks with their big ears and a swarm of different species of gazelle which, with the loveliest legs, leap most fleetly, whose veins are visible under their skin, an inexhaustible metaphor for Arab poets praising the slenderness of their beloved and the delicacy of her skin.

Less rich in small bird-life than the rainy countries, the bush has cultivated the tree-hoopoe, which always lives in company, chattering, screaming, even mourning with others when one has been shot, and living in strict monogamy (faithful husbands are the most talkative). The black rhinoceros bird is a different matter: he enjoys himself on his own, but has invented a system of his own for the mother-bird and her young: till the young birds are fledged, he walls them up with their mother in damp clay and feeds them from the outside. If he dies, he has, like an Indian prince, the glorious feeling that his wife must die with him. Of the bigger birds, the bush is inhabited by the red-necked hawk, sitting in the duhlebe palm, as swift and bold as his northern brother, and the hooded eagle, spreading his crest for hours in the sun on the naked boughs of an acacia, opening, closing, opening it again.

But the lord of all, the great air-policeman, is the vulture, who leads the dance of death in the desert and the bush with his heavy, drooping wings, his heavy, drooping head, his straddling gait, his cruel, piercing eyes. No hygienist could invent a better means of preventing the development of poisonous gases in these temperatures from the decay of dead bodies. Yet the vulture is not guided by chemistry or the sense of smell; the vulture sees, and as, with his powerful wings, he can quickly fly over long distances, the fallen camel, the dead gazelle cannot escape him for an hour. No one has ever smelt a corpse in these regions: hardly is a creature dead when they are there, as quick as heirs. With their long necks they burrow into their prey, fight, vulture against vulture, for some bit of guts they have torn out, and, before the eyes of travellers, have left practically no trace of a dead dog within five minutes. But a year after they have been stuffed and filled with camphor, they are still odorous in the

scientist's study, and yet fugitive and famished slaves have been seen to eat vulture flesh.

Over the plain, over the river, the bowl of the sky fills at evening with tender light. In the west, a piercing yellow appears, then a narrow misty belt of grey-green. Then the palest mauve-pink begins, deepening quickly to a massive dark mauve spreading up to the dove-blue of the zenith. Towards the east the sky is lightened by flashes of reflected red mingled with pearly blue, violet-grey, flamingo pink, till, a minute later, a hard, steely blue touches the reddish-yellow hills of the desert. In the east, the light turns colder, the pink greyer.

Meanwhile, in the west, the lowest strip has deepened to a vicious sulphur-yellow. The river, over which a black bird glides in slanting flight, has turned yellow again, with grey-blue ripples, thrown into a chaos of light and shadow by the play of the little waves. Soon the yellow strip to the south-west is drowned in a sunset orange spreading from the brightest point at its centre, which quickly turns grey and livid towards the east. Meanwhile, at the very point where the sun set, a strange blue bay has swelled in the form of a chalice: it cuts flashing into the yellow tones, which now have turned more reddish. For meanwhile the night, rising from the east, has taken possession of the west and overcome the red-yellow belt at that proudest point where the light of day sank. Now the night has conquered, the colours die away.

The voice of the stream sounds louder: the Nile flows northward into the night.

III

Only a nomad can be master of desert and plain, for if he lives on his herds, he must lead them from pasture to pasture, following the vagaries of the climate and the river, and, above all, the belts of rain. Kingdoms stretch lavishly in front of him, belonging to nobody, and even though he has not to conquer them, he must constantly seek new ones before returning to the old.

It is not only in this respect that he puts into practice the old farmer's saw which grants the field its rest when it has borne fruit. There are other transitions to the farmer, and the Arabs to the south of Meroë, moving about as half-nomads with their flocks, sow corn at the same time, move on after the sowing, leaving it to the mercy of Allah, return only for the harvest, grind the corn, eat the bread, and again move on. The dhurra, like the camel, makes no demands and gives the highest yield, bringing forth five hundred-fold, and half of all the cultivated land in the Soudan is under dhurra. Other tribes leave selected families behind in the oases to cultivate the corn, who, in the end, settle, and in a few generations even degenerate into traders.

At all points the nomad proves himself a king, the farmer a serf, although he grows richer than the king. Living on the river or in the oases, some of which, it is true, can extend to provinces, his eyes fixed anxiously on the earth, desolate if the weather lays it waste, the farmer unites in communities to protect himself better from the wild animals and the elements, but his greatest dread is the nomad, who lives on the confines of the steppe and regards the cultivated oases as outposts, to be besieged and plundered. The farmer distrusts the nomad just as the sober citizen distrusts the adventurer; shut up in

his security, which is none, trusting to laws which totter, and all the same helpless in face of the vagaries of the river and the rain, which no community can dominate, he loses his beauty.

Beauty is with the nomad. Although the tribes of the Soudan have become hopelessly confused owing to the lack of mountain and river boundaries in this flat land, certain characteristics are common to all tribes. The intermingling of these aboriginal Ethiopians with the Arabs, who have crossed the Red Sea these four hundred years, has only gone to reinforce their characteristics as men of the desert. Camels, cattle, sheep, goats—it is reckoned that there are seven million of them in the Soudan—tents and huts, wife and child, the springs, the wanderings, the absence of fixed hours of labour, the sheik as leader, the duel which at once decides the quarrel, insecurity, faith and superstition, a land without frontiers, freedom without bounds, a life according to Goethe's Arab talismans: must not ages of life in such conditions make man draw nearer to Allah, grow more comely?

Tall and lean, gaunt and bony, a man that has always eaten rather too little, a Bedouin of the plain stands beside his camel, bronze-brown, yet with a bloom over the golden shimmer of his satiny skin, with finely jointed ankles and limbs. The short, clipped beard looks like a prop to the oval of the face; the big ears, lying close to the head, like those of antelopes, the aquiline nose, which makes the aristocrats of all the world akin, the furrowed brow, jutting over deep-set, hunter's eyes, the narrow mouth, patient and silent, well-marked, but not salient lips, make a whole eloquent of the courage and prudence, the dignity and simplicity, of the man on his own resources, always in close contact with fate, perpetually dependent on its freaks. A man whose whole life is spent like the youth, at most, of interesting white men, a

man who bears the laws of the stars in his being and the marks of the sun on his body—"looking burnt," Herodotus said—a being whose self-confidence is born of his body, who translates the power of his eyes, which are three times as keen as the white man's, into the strength of his soul, a man whose ancestors always chose the handsomest for their kings, whose Court, when the king had lost the use of a limb, at once sacrificed the same one. Such truly royal customs were recorded by Strabo; most have survived till to-day.

In these latitudes, among these tribes, battle is still a necessity and hence magnificent; here man still stands up to man, the rules of combat, mercy, and sacrifice are still written in heaven, generosity is a virtue, like vengeance. These heathens could still interpret and mould to their own use the creed of Mohammed, but Christianity remained alien to them. They still have many a custom in common with the nomads of the Old Testament; revenge, reverence of age, the casting up of dust in danger, the rending of their garments. There are pilgrims, too, among these nomads, negroes from the west coast of Africa, who cross the whole continent to see Mecca, earning their living on the way, remaining often for years here between the White and the Blue Niles, founding families, and reaching the tomb of the prophet twenty years after they set out, a feat of pious valour such as no sect of the Western world has been able to record to this very day.

But that is quite alien to the native nomad. He knows no *sura*, no Koran, of Mecca he knows only its orientation, for he has learnt to set his rug in the sand that way before he prays.

Even the women he treats with more freedom than the surrounding religions and customs permit: the Bedouin understands love. As the women do not live in a harem, there are romances and battles: an English explorer a hundred years ago found the power of the women in a tribe of the Djalli

Arabs between Sennar and Kordofan so great that on marrying they stipulated in writing for one free day in four, so that on the fourth day they could present their suitors with chartered rights. Even to-day there are in these regions witches who can make a man impotent, restoring him his manliness rarely and then, very cleverly, only to their own use.

Even here, the best proof of their laxity in love is their doubt of the heir: that is characteristic of this adventurer without house or land, of this wanderer on the face of the earth whose only certainties are God and the moment. "Whether the husband is the father," says an Arab writer of the Bisharin, the handsomest Bedouins, "is never certain, but they can be sure of the mother. Hence they feel themselves safer with the issue of their daughter or sister," and exclude their own son from the heritage, passing it on to their daughter's or their sister's son, in whom the succession by blood is beyond doubt. This right of inheritance in the female line determined the succession in the royal family of Sennar till its extinction a hundred years ago.

In the course of the year, the day comes when the Bedouin cleans up his land. Then he sharpens a stick of the "fire-tree," one of the leguminosae, makes a notch in another, fits the point into the notch, and works them about until a smoky-smelling powder is produced, which begins to smoulder. With that he sets fire to the dry grass in the direction of the wind: in half an hour the plain is on fire. Then the gazelles take to their heels, the snakes seek shelter, insects, trying to find a refuge in the bushes, fall victim to the bee-eater, the snake-buzzard catches everything that flies, while the leopard takes flight instead of pursuing prey: there is a wholesale scamper through the bush.

Only the Bedouin regards the fire with satisfaction, for now he has cleared his pasture.

IV

Misquoting slightly an old Arab scholar, we might say that the Nile flows four months through the wilderness (jungle, mountain, and swamp), two months through the land of the blacks, and one through the land of Mohammed.

"When Allah made the Soudan, Allah laughed," says an Arab proverb, but one may wonder at which part of the Soudan he laughed, for it is a world in itself, with blooming and arid provinces. The Soudan stretches from the tropical forest into the desert: it is called "the land of the blacks," it is five times as big as France, but has only six million inhabitants: it runs right across north-east Africa, hence it cannot but vary greatly according to the river and the rain. A land of lowlands and flat hills, with a single volcanic region in Darfur, falling gently from three thousand feet in the south, flanked by mountains to south and east, and partly in the west too, rising as a whole from west to east, in the direction of Abyssinia, the rain reaches it with varying strength and at different times, so that it shows no uniformity of flora, fauna, or men.

The rainfall, which, in the neighbourhood of the swamps, amounts to forty inches a year, and at Khartoum to six, stops entirely from eighteen degrees on, about Berber, and only begins again close above Cairo. To the south of the Tropic of Cancer, where the trade wind is interrupted when the sun reaches the zenith, that is, where the rising air cools down over the hottest area, it falls again as rain in the months of June to August, because at that time the sun rapidly reaches and quits the zenith on the latitude of Khartoum, a scanty summer rain which brings forth grass and tamarisks, thorn-bushes and little acacias. On the other hand, farther south, owing to the

greater distance from the tropic, there are two ill-defined rainy seasons, and complete drought from May to August. In September, when the sun dries out the sodden earth, the air is like a Turkish bath.

Nubia denotes only the part of the Soudan that stretches roughly from Khartoum to Assouan: Upper Nubia, which belongs to the Soudan, reaches as far as Wadi Halfa. In the west the Soudan is bounded by the white Powers, but not by nature, for there the desert stretches straight across the continent, and sand and wind blow over the helpless stakes which at wide intervals attempt to divide the unity of the desert into British and French dominions.

This land above Wadi Halfa was called by the Egyptians and in the Bible the Land of Kush, by the Romans, Ethiopia. Of its provinces, the only name known to the world to-day is that of Kordofan, for gold and rubber has long come from there: the world knows, too, that the Northern Soudan was Christian for several centuries and has been Mohammedan since the fourteenth century, that Semitic and Hamitic peoples with a strain of negro blood live in the north, negroes with a strain of Hamitic blood in the south. Nubia, the name we can adopt for the Soudan to the north of Khartoum, has preserved its ancient customs better than Egypt, with its flood of foreigners, for here civilization penetrated from the north only in very ancient and in very modern times: in between the Arabs came over the Red Sea, for, long before the white races had ever dreamed of it, they had sailed to Zanzibar.

Here, too, the Nile determined the course of history, just because it did not form a constant waterway. At the first cataract, by Assouan, Mediterranean civilization ceased. With galleys rowed by native slaves groaning under the whip of the conqueror, all the civilized powers from the Pharaohs to Mohamed Ali attempted to pass the rapids, either on

the river itself or by dragging the boats along the bank.

In this huge country, there was no attempt to achieve unity until a hundred years ago; it was first achieved in our century, which may well pass away before it is fully consolidated. The peoples of antiquity, on the middle Nile, only created brief flashes. In the interior, great empires rose where the trees of the south stop and the bush begins, for a king can no more survey the savannah than a giraffe, for which reason both moved into the bush.

But these kings, some between the Blue and the White Niles, some in Darfur on the White, knew little of each other, for they, and other smaller dominions, differing in tongue and creed, were connected only by a river which was not navigable. The Fungs, who founded their dynasty when Cervantes and Leonardo da Vinci were flourishing in Europe, held part of Upper Nubia together for three hundred years: they entered history because great scholars from Arabia and Baghdad sojourned at their black court. Perhaps they will only survive in legend in the person of that gallant but sensible king who had thirty-three rooms built for his thirty-three wives, and three hundred and sixty-five goats and a quantity of beer brought into the courtyard of his palace so that he might have his peace for a year, then locked the door, admitting his chancellor once a day. This excellent monarch—perhaps it was no mere hazard that he reigned in the European eighteenth century—by ruling half an hour a day certainly made his people happier than his conquering fathers. All these native kings of the Soudan lost their power about 1800, but the Fungs died out only in 1916, and even to-day their distant descendants are to be found in neat huts under the palms at Singa on the Blue Nile, where, as the last scions of mighty princes, they perform the coffee ceremony with dignity.

A hundred years ago, the capital of the Soudan was born of a camp of tents. A conquering prince from Egypt realized the vital importance to world history of the point where the two Niles meet, and named it Khartoum, after the trunk-shaped peninsula formed by the confluence, for Khartoum means "elephant trunk." Lying vertically below the source, and above the mouth of the Nile, in the middle of the White and at the mouth of the Blue, it is the mathematical and dramatic centre of the wonderful river, where thought would make a halt even if there were no town. As it lies there, it extends from the fertile double Nile to the edge of the plain, linking the profusion of tropical gardens with the sands of the desert, an image of the river which created it. Lying where the Nile divides the desert, sketched in like a whim of God, the town is the meeting-point of all the roads connecting the two oceans on this latitude. A thousand pilgrims and a thousand traders crossed the Nile long before the bridges, in hope and prayer, or fleeing from persecution, to hide themselves in the desert beyond, and if all the ghosts of all the slaves were to arise here, who were driven from Kordofan to the Red Sea to end in the unfathomable depths of Arabia, their train of suffering would take weeks and weeks to pass, and the mountain of gold their sellers gained by them would be big enough to choke up both Niles and so to flood the land that no one would ever need to be a slave again—but Egypt would dry up.

Where the two Niles embrace like brothers, there lies a palmy island formed by the branching of the Blue Nile, on whose rich soil fruit and vegetables grow. Where bridges and railways, motor boats and aeroplanes speak of our century, the water-wheel which made its appearance on the last reaches of both rivers turns even to-day.

Here at Khartoum, the island of Tuti is the first piece of

land on the White Nile to be fertilized by the silt of the Blue. In splendour and profusion, watered by a hundred water-wheels through days, years, and centuries, the bold date-palms, the huge baobabs rise from the gardens of the governor and the high officials, whose palaces and stone houses speak here of England. From these rulers a carefully graduated scale descends through Greeks and Syrians to the Soudanese, who in no wise appear here as the lords of the land.

Where the row of gardens ends, close to the confluence and the second bridge, lies the strangest zoo in the world: formed and kept with the greatest skill, it contains only animals native to the country. Here the gazelles walk fearless, flirting for the first time in their lives with the lion, who looks out from behind his bars with the sad eyes of the captive beast of prey. And beside the gazelles, the shoebird struts about with its comic gait, the egrets bathe, the cranes flaunt, the humped dromedary glides over the grass and the young hippopotamus, behind an apology for bars, displays his huge pink mouth: they might be vague imitations of what is going on outside, a pretty parade instead of a war.

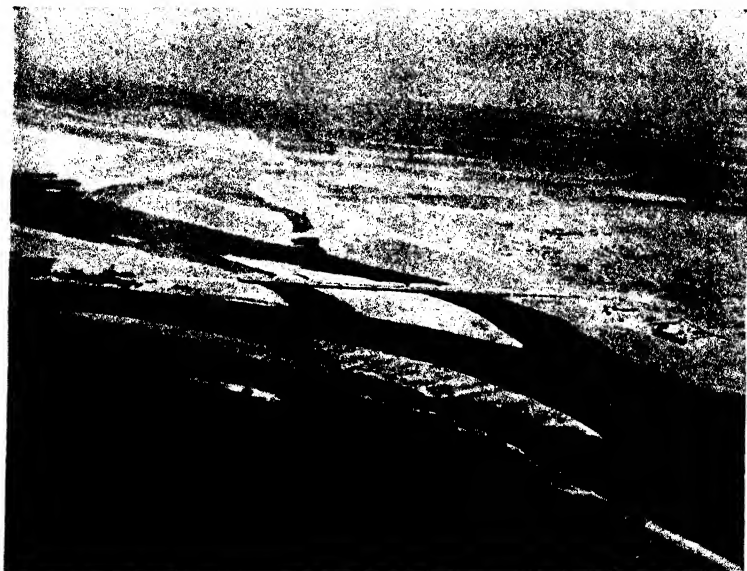
But when the master of the garden comes, the major who loves beasts and men, a great expert on this fauna, they run to meet him, the gazelle nuzzles him in the back with her sharp horns, for she knows he has his pockets full of food, and Jane, the lovely cheetah, sweeps her bars with feline grace to greet him. Looking at the miniature Africa, with its partly tame, partly half-enclosed animals, strange thoughts arise of the taming of the three million inhabitants, who, taken from their state of nature, were trained to become workers in the cotton fields, teachers and bank clerks, and nobody can say for certain whether they are not savage still, like the half-prisoned animals in the zoo.

Beyond, on the left bank of the Nile, they have their own town, three times as big as British Khartoum. This is Omdurman, founded only fifty years ago on a vacant beach, a white counterfort to the red-tiled city of Khartoum. There are no ramparts here now, they are replaced by the masses huddled together in this second largest town in Africa. Will they always submit? Thirty-five years ago they made themselves masters of the Gothic palace on the other side.

This densely crowded oasis is flooded with desert light, that is by a radiation such as the sun creates elsewhere only on glaciers. In this light, street and markets swarm with arts and crafts. Saddlers sew gaudy leather to make cushions, or hammer shining nails into saddles, smiths grip the iron with work-torn hands, silversmiths hold silver in their tapering fingers, balances are held aloft to weigh the silver rupee, spirited horses, gloomy camels, wise grey asses, neighing and braying pell-mell, are bought and sold on land, boats and sails are bought and sold on the beach, and men and beasts scream each other down. The turban and the fez, the well-groomed mane of the Bedouin and the shorn head of the Egyptian trader, fly-blown melons looking like meat, lumps of mutton looking like enormous melons, children and priests, shouts and protests, carpet sellers and brothel-keepers, sheiks and mountebanks, officials, coachmen, and camel drivers, dark brown negroes with gaudy tufts of feathers, swarthy Syrians, slim Greeks in tropical suits, huge Kordofanese in red silk garments, squat Persians covered with furs to sell, half-castes with negro hair, red eyebrows, and an aquiline nose, planted here by some Alexandrian prince in the Middle Ages, or by an English nobleman a few years ago, all pushing their way in the incredible noise, in the relentless smells, through the low white streets, and the tram driver displays the iron nerves of a dictator, for he brings his tram,



ABYSSINIAN SOLDIERS



[Karakashian Bros.]

THE CONFLUENCE OF THE TWO NILES FROM THE AIR

crowded inside and out, to the bridge without losing a man.

But where the cloudless glitter of the sun is reflected in the embrace of the rivers, an old man, led by a naked child, glides along the quay. He hears the noise of his brothers, can even smell them, but Allah has taken from him Africa's greatest gift, light.

V

In a little Paris café, among white-coated waiters and men and women trying to shout down the braying gramophone over their bock at their wooden table, two men are coolly playing billiards in the circle of light shed by a hanging green lamp. They are in shirt-sleeves, for sometimes it is an acrobatic feat to reach across the table with their long cues: city clerks, perhaps, who have spent their day adding up figures or sorting samples: now, in perfect silence, they strike the ball, which rolls noiselessly along the fine cloth to the rubber-lined edge of the table, so that, by the rules of the game, it shall strike two other balls. At that same moment, at a few thousand other tables, a few thousand other intent and skilful players are at the same game, generally in the evening, in cafés or clubs, and they are nearly all men. Since billiards were invented four centuries ago in Italy, it has been a game for solitaires: the mass, playing golf with its arms or cards with its head, finds billiards, which requires both, too exacting.

To make these three balls, which the two men knock about on the green cloth every evening, the hugest animal of the earth, the last of the primeval giants to reach into our shrunken dimensions, has had to fall, for its two tusks yield eight or ten balls, the ammunition for three billiard tables, that is, for six men in shirt sleeves under a green lamp. The various

articles made of these tusks even to-day (the Romans made artificial teeth of them), combs and fans, slide-rules and chessmen, jewel-boxes, piano-keys, and umbrella-handles, rings and buckles, are mere by-products compared with the billiard balls, belong without exception to the world of play and decoration, and are easy to replace, both as regards form and beauty. The balls alone, with their peculiar density, could not, in former times, be produced from any other material: everything else can be made more beautifully of costly bone and wood, and when the lady at her harpsichord, who till that time had delighted in the gleam of her white hands on the black keys, adopted white keys in the eighteenth century because the black made her eyes swim, at least one command of the muses came to reduce the scattered hazard of the industry to order, for, with ivory keys, the piano was better played.

Not only the elephant, but the native elephant hunters on the Nile were ignorant of all that: they only saw Arabs and Turks bringing chests of splendid things on their camels and boats and asking nothing in exchange but an elephant tusk. Even to-day the negroes cannot understand why the white man does not prefer a hippo hide, from which whips and saddles can be made, or congoni horns, which can be carved, or the juice of certain herbs, which can be used for poisoning arrowheads. They certainly carry all these things away with them, but their real passion is the elephant tusk, and a Dinka chief whose father made provision for the white man's folly and buried a hoard of tusks on the Nile, can buy what he likes with them and becomes lord of the world.

The native only hunted the elephants when they broke into his fields, and even then as rarely as possible, for he could get his meat more easily from a hippo and the great fissile tusks were only good for stakes to bind the oxen. And as the elephant, unlike the lions, leopards, and crocodiles,

attacks and carries off neither men nor other animals, the negroes hunted it less than the other animals, and could even manage at times to scare it out of their fields with howls and yells. No negro saga makes it wicked, and many make it wise.

Certain mighty kings had long used ivory for their adornment, but only when the white man, the "Turco," made his appearance, long ago to the north of Khartoum, but only a hundred years ago on the Upper Nile, did his desire make the elephant desirable as an object of trade in the grand style, and the vision of glass beads and rifles which the white man offered in exchange at once made elephant hunting popular. The same thing happened to the elephant as to the "hereditary enemy" of a state: he was the victim of a catchword, and now everybody set about hunting him.

This mightiest and most quick-witted of animals can only be conquered by so small a creature as man through cunning and fear: they dig pitfalls near the water, which they strew with elephant dung, then spear the helpless animals in them to death: they encircle the bush in thousands, set fire to it, narrow the circle by advancing with the flames, which dazzle and confuse the animal: they pursue it in hundreds, driving it towards other hundreds hidden up in trees, who drop spears on it from above, chasing it through the undergrowth from which long spears protrude like crowbars to rend and twist open wounds in its flesh, and the colossus sinks to earth. Only the famous Bagara, to the north of Khartoum, hunt it chivalrously on horseback: with long lances of male bamboo, two of these Nubians gallop towards the herd, single out the elephant with the finest tusks, one keeps it in play on horseback, the other dismounts and, standing, drives his lance deep into its abdomen, then he mounts and gallops off and the other repeats the manœuvre.

When the hero has at last succumbed, men stream out of their hiding-places, howls of joy ring through the bush, the prize is two fine tusks, white and heavy. And far away, nine balls are rolling on green tables, surrounded by men in shirt-sleeves.

He was not easy to kill. Nature has protected her masterpiece, especially in this continent. For the brain of the African elephant is so situated on a bony plate over the roots of the upper molars that a bullet passes over it when he raises his head, as he always does when confronted with his attacker: thus even a grazing shot sits fast in the stiff bones and cartilages which contain the roots of the tusks. For the roots had to be placed three feet deep so that the huge head might keep its balance and support the strain when he uses the tusk as a lever to uproot a tree.

The African elephant is in all ways superior to his Indian brother. The arched back, the gigantic ears which, thrown back, cover the shoulder, and, folded, are frightful to see, the convex forehead and receding skull, all these details make his thrust more powerful. As he grows to over ten feet, so that the female is of the size of the Indian male, as he lives more on trees than the Indian, who eats grass, he requires more powerful tusks: in the Soudan, several together have been seen uprooting trees a hundred feet high, some using their tusks as crowbars, others tugging at the branches with their trunks. Thus armed, and, moreover, more active in the open bushland than the other in the Ceylon forests, they are not to be killed by a frontal attack: at most they can be turned by continued fire from the biggest calibres.

Even in beauty of outline the African is superior: this beauty resides in clarity, as in the Egyptian statues: the head and trunk and ears form a more perfect whole in the Soudanese elephant than in the Indian. The light footfall of this heaviest

of animals is incomparable: in excitement, he merely shakes his gigantic legs, just as men of self-control, in moments of growing suspense, merely shift from one foot to the other. Altogether, he is the pattern of a spirited yet childlike, and hence cheerful, being.

But now he lies dead on the plain, with a hundred black men round him, eager for his flesh, for his tusks. The myriad wrinkles on his skin tell the story of the forest and the steppe of storms and insects: it is an atlas of whole countries with smooth, as it were untouched spots between them, as there may be on the soul of an aged man.

But when the black hands have at last hewn the two curved white trophies from his jaws, they by no means form a pair. Often the elephant uses one tusk more than the other, as men use their right hand, or one has been broken, or a hard deposit has formed round some old spear head or a bullet in the tusk. As the tusk has been built up in rings, like the trunk of a tree, with the youngest inside, for a hundred years maybe, as it has continued to grow even in old age, it is not uniform even in colour. In the same way, after the death of a great man, criticism and analysis set to work on him, although, but a short time before, he stood harmonious, a living whole. But now they are already hacking off the huge feet from the corpse, for the chief demands four feet to two tusks, to protect himself from cheating.

Many a native king on the Upper Nile has collected hoards of ivory as his forebears collected hoards of gold: to this very day, four-fifths of all the ivory comes out of such hoards. Less is used to-day, for the balls can be made so well of synthetic materials that, of the genuine sort, only the hardest West African kinds are used for preference, as being most like the artificial ones. Critically compared, the synthetic balls are not as beautiful as those taken from the living tusk, but

then the living elephant looks finer than the dead one. Since, moreover, the aeroplane has discovered the haunts of the great herds on the Upper Nile, since the English have imposed a tax of £50 for every elephant shot and have created vast reservations, ivory is now only dealt with in the same way as diamonds or radium—rarities, the acquisition and price of which is controlled throughout the world.

To-day, in the Antwerp market, there is a whole scale of colour, strength, density, grain: the tusks are bleached for piano-keys, for in nature, pure white is rare and hence looks unnatural: a pair of enormous tusks weighing four hundred and fifty pounds was presented as a wedding-gift to King George, who had no idea where to put them. The material cast by the machine in turning the balls is shaken into a sack from which, as from a magic box, there issue buckles, handles, inlaid work, polishing powder, and even edible jellies. Even to-day, ivory is exported from Africa to the value of a million pounds, and the native king on the Upper Nile who has hoarded anything up to a thousand tusks, a black capitalist, goes one better than the white manager of a London factory who has never seen the Nile, and, in his armchair, with his list in his hands, shows that his present stock contains thirty thousand assorted balls. For those balls, three thousand elephants have died, and any one of them was, in strength and beauty, worth more than the manager.

VI

Elephant hunting turned into man hunting. The later history of the Nile and the development of the Soudan, which was completely dominated by the slave-trade, would have been different if there had been no billiards. Many thousands of

men, living in a state of paradise, became the captives and eunuchs of men living in its contrary because two city clerks in shirt-sleeves needed three balls for their green table.

In the beginning, some trader of genius had discovered glass beads as a means of barter, and gave the delighted negro or Soudanese five big beads for a tusk. Was that cheating? Were the ten-cent pearls less beautiful than real ones which would have cost £100? Was the value of billiard balls not imaginary too, seeing that they were so soon to be imitated, like the pearls. What fixed the value of diamonds, their beauty or their rarity? Many a cheap, half-precious stone has a more fantastic effect. The arbitrariness of such valuation is revealed by the rich women's habit of wearing, instead of their real pearls, a row of gaudy glass beads round their neck, quite in the taste of the negro, while their feet move to the rhythm of negro dances.

So the negro was not cheated, but his greed was awakened, the glitter of the tawdry stuffs and stones with which the cunning Arab bewitched the great sunburnt child made him want more, and fired him with the joy of barter: he was expelled from his paradise. Now he compared his hoard of beads with his neighbour's, sat for hours beside the strange trader in front of his chest, fingering many a glittering stuff which he would have liked to steal, if the trader had not had rifles. Buy—yes, but with what? His ivory had run out and until his whole tribe met for a new hunt, which would, after all, only bring in four to six tusks, much time might pass. Besides, it was the rainy season, the Nile was high, the western rivers made hunting difficult. What could he, a poor naked negro chief, offer the great pasha? He possessed nothing but cattle and slaves.

Slaves? Supposing the trader were disposed to take on a few more hands? The trader nodded, that was what he had

been waiting for. His own fathers had dealt for a century in slaves from Abyssinia, and had grown rich by providing slaves for Arabia's insatiable slave-hunger. This was a piece of luck! Here, at the end of the world, in a country without laws, without control, protected by his rifles, armed with the glitter of his beads and cloths, there was business to be done in men which no rise in the price of ivory could reach.

The idea was new to the chief: it appealed to him. Till that time, no slave-trade had developed on the Nile, as it had on the west coast of Africa, from the capture of enemy men, and especially women, who were used for field-labour and hence regarded as a kind of war-indemnity. But now he began, and since neither force nor law could check either whites or blacks, the new custom spread with the rapidity of the bush-fires. There was another chief who needed thirty women for field-labour and thirty cowherds, but shunned war with his neighbours out of fear, laziness, or advanced age. Now he saw a few hundred men in his great Arab friend's pen. Supposing he were to offer him a tusk from his hoard for every three slaves?

By such barter, in ever-changing forms, which the oriental loves, the ivory-dealer last century became a slave-dealer, the slave-dealer a slave-hunter, and the slave-hunter in his turn an ivory-dealer. Man and elephant hunts vied with each other on the Upper Nile. From Khartoum, Arab business men concluded treaties with negro chiefs through their emissaries, played them off against each other, and made them sell their subjects, just as the Elector of Hesse did in Germany. What possibilities for those bold, ingenious spirits, one of whom first made his way through the swamps to the Bahr-el-Ghazal, found lost tribes there, caught and bartered them, and even became an agent of civilization by opening up unknown peoples on the Nile! Then East Africa, too, became what

has been called the house of bondage. But no trader would have penetrated through all the dangers of the Nile and the negroes to the third degree of latitude if he had not been drawn on by the lust of ivory to where it was to be found.

Some fugitive or adventurer, some Ali, would find a rich man in Khartoum ready to be inveigled into lending him a few hundred pounds in order to get it back with a hundred per cent profit in ivory six months later. Then Ali would collect a few dozen shady helpers, buy boats, rifles, bullets, and a few hundredweight of glass beads, which had been blown into existence by the bloodless mouth of some glassblower on the Venetian lagoons. The men would get five months' pay in advance, fifteen dollars each and the promise of double at the end of the river-pirate's raid. Each got a slip of paper to keep his accounts, and promptly gave it back to Ali, who was the only one who could write. They went up Nile in December, as far as the Shilluks, even as far as the Dinkas, where friendship would be sworn with some chief, who got a few rifles and went off forthwith to make war on his enemy, his neighbour. Meanwhile Ali and his men would attack a village, burn it, kill most of the men, hack off their hands for the sake of their bracelets, and drive away the women, children, and herds. Then Ali would rejoin his new black friend and make him a present of cattle and a beautiful girl.

But now the savage king, greedy for more cattle, would drag his hidden ivory into the camp of the stranger, whom he regarded as a pasha, a god. The men would get part of the spoils, even some of the slaves, because the slave-markets began even here, and every one would buy as many as he could. Ali wrote everything down on the little slip of paper, to dock it off the pay later. Then the men would parade in front of a captive his wailing wife or his father, and give him back for a few fine tusks.

The last act: a quarrel with the allied chief, whom Ali would plunder or kill, so that his wife and children became slaves too. And when the crowded boats set out for home, some of the men would stay behind to carry on the game, and to sell the trader the fresh spoils the next year. Before Khartoum was reached, the goods would be disembarked and distributed among middlemen, to prevent the authorities from finding out how rich Ali had grown. The slaves were driven through the desert, over the Red Sea to Arabia, even to Cairo, each one in the sheba, a fork round his neck with a long handle touching his outstretched arm: if he let his arm sink, he was throttled by the fork. That was the worst moment of his fate. Ali would bring his capitalist the promised ivory, in good years up to twenty thousand pounds, to a value of £4,000 in Khartoum. As he paid his men in slaves, that cost him nothing, and he had a net profit of a few hundred slaves worth £5 to £6 each. Ali, like many a white man of business, had made his fortune with a by-product.

Thus the slave-dealers became a political power, and in the south were more powerful than the Government, often allying with native chiefs against it. The Egyptian officers, often paid in slaves instead of in money, officials, small and great, the Pasha himself, lording it in Khartoum, all speculated as if in a Wall Street boom. From 1840 to 1860 forty to sixty thousand men are said to have been sold yearly, and the number of dead is incalculable. As the whole business has to be carried on underhand, it all had to be done by bribery. Commerce on the Upper Nile, which had begun with ivory, became a State necessity, brought about a State crisis, and in the end even led to the decline of Egyptian supremacy.

VII

One day, a Frenchman appeared before the ruler of Egypt, bearing a strange gift—a bag of seed. Cailliaud, the explorer, had brought cotton-seed with him from the Soudan, had shown specimens of its peculiar fruit, and inspired the Khedive with the idea of cultivating it in the fertile delta. Mohamed Ali had probably not read Pliny, for he had been trained as an Albanian soldier, but he certainly knew of the tradition of Egyptian cotton, and as he was no hereditary king, but a conqueror, he was intelligent enough to grasp at once the value of the hint. There will be plenty to say about that later on. It was about 1820 when the botanist's report came to supplement and give final confirmation to the earlier ones made by civil officials and military commanders.

But the attentive Pasha picked up other things from the Frenchman's tales, and true and false were mingled as in oriental tales. There was gold in the Soudan, which the old Pharaohs had worked, there was ivory to be had from countless elephants, there was incense in Kordofan, and as for the diamonds, tidings of which had come along the Nile from olden times, they were certainly to be found below the eighteenth parallel, since they had been found in other places on that latitude in Africa. Cailliaud brought a glass of water from the confluence of the two Niles, for he was both an expert and an enthusiast, and just on that account impressed the enterprising spirit of the ruler. And the Frenchman spoke, too, of the source of the Nile, which an ambitious king should discover. What would Europe have to say to an Egyptian conqueror if he were to appear in the guise of a pioneer of science?

Mohamed probably betrayed no word of his political musings

to the scientist with his glass of holy water. Gold would be good, diamonds too; still better to get rid of the last Mamelukes in Cairo, with whose brothers he had had a momentous quarrel, to occupy his idle Egyptian and Albanian troops, to attract trade from the Red Sea to Egypt—above all to get soldiers! To get soldiers from that hot country, the dream of all dictators, even if there are already so many that they are looking for something to do—soldiers, that means slaves set free to be re-enslaved. How long had these Nubians been owing their taxes? And if the tax-gatherers had pocketed them, all the more reason for inventing a tax which would bring something in—and that meant soldiers! If this cotton really grew wild, what if it were to be cultivated there on a large scale and brought down the Nile? And gold, and ivory, and the glory of discovering the source!

Mohamed Ali, with whose expeditions, between 1820 and 1840, the written history of the Soudan really first begins, this astonishing creature, of whom we shall hear further at the mouth of the river, paid his boldness dear. His son Ismail, a twenty-two-year-old general who had subjected the tribes in a rapid march up to the eleventh parallel, finally fell into a trap. In Shendi, below Khartoum, on the Nile, he had exacted as tribute from the mighty Mek Nimur, 1,000 oxen, 1,000 young girl slaves, 1,000 camels, sheep, and goats, 1,000 camel-loads of corn, and 1,000 camel-loads of straw. Mek Nimur bowed, saying: "Your arithmetic is of a monumental simplicity. A thousand seems to be the only number you know."

When all was gathered together, and the straw heaped up round the camp, the Mek invited them all to a feast in his house, vanished late at night, set fire to the whole, and destroyed the young conqueror with his officers. A frightful revenge was taken. Shendi was burnt to the ground, a

thousand women and children were slaughtered on the banks of the river, and only the Mek escaped to the desert.

In spite of all the atrocities which filled these campaigns, exploration went hand in hand with conquest. There was a king in Sennar whose favourite dish was human liver with beer: the ears of prisoners were sent to the Viceroy in Cairo, yet at the same time Khartoum was founded, and light boats reached the Dinkas, who had never been reached before. Later, the Pasha came in person into the Soudan, and won immortality by a new form of tax-proclamation: on the middle tree of every village he hung a sack of camel dung, and the village had to pay as many dollars as there were balls of dung. In the end, peace was restored to the accessible parts of the country—the peace of a graveyard. But in the south, robbers had followed the discoverers, just as they do to-day, when they call themselves explorers.

The exploitation of these quite unguarded regions set in with this questionable conquest, the greed of the traders was drawn up-Nile abreast of the explorers' efforts. Missionaries advanced and were forced to withdraw: for the Pope, Africa became a "vicariate," for a Sardinian consul, a "base." Up there on the Nile, where the path of Egyptian and Nubian traders and robbers crossed that of Austrian missionaries, the former out for ivory, the latter out to win the negro for Jesus, where remote Great Powers could conceal their aims under the message of one prophet, just as others concealed their slave hunts under the message of another, one thing could not but grow, in these lost corners of the world—the hate of the Nubian for the Christian, the attraction of the Christian to the negro.

Later, when Ismail, Mohamed Ali's successor, saw his strength broken by his good intentions, and the great slave-dealers, defiant like kings in their keeps, determined to pay

only such taxes at such a time as the strength of their private armies made necessary, harried by debts and enemies, he called in a foreigner to help in the Soudan, the first Egyptian to do so; as Governor, Christian, and Englishman, he was to get his teeth into the problem. It was a man with splendid teeth that came.

Samuel Baker was forty before his mind turned to Africa. Till then he had been merely the wild hunter of Ceylon, a restless wanderer through the world, who declared that in England he wilted like a plant in a dark room. It ran in his blood: on the coast of Jamaica he had seen his father's sailing fleet sail off with sugar for England. A young giant, all lungs, eyes, and arms, he flung himself into panther-hunting in Ceylon, and when he wrote it all down in a book, nobody cast any doubt on his traveller's tales. Something prehistoric emanates from him, as he stands half-naked leaning on his spear, and it is easy to understand that he needed a "battery of rifles."

Baker was in no sense of the word brutal: he understood and loved animals and children, reared a little slave-boy, and nearly despaired of life when three of his own children died within three years. Hot-tempered, but soon appeased, as strong men often are, born to command, but generous and hospitable, independent owing to inherited wealth, above all, blessed with radiant health, he seemed to be born to adventure. The only thing needful to such a man was war.

He arrived too late for the Crimean War, but there, when his invalid wife was dead, he found the companion he needed. With this lovely Hungarian he went bear-hunting in Asia Minor, till he grew tired of it. In those days, in 1861, the English hunters and adventurers could speak of nothing but the Nile. There was another kind of elephant there, different species of game from those in Ceylon, and hunting without

end, but there was a victor's crown too, a goal, a fulfilment worthy of the toil. There was the struggle against slavery, which was just rousing the men of the west, which meant freedom, humanity, and glory.

Then Baker, always accompanied by his wife, discovered the second source of the Nile in three arduous years, a story of greatness and courage, of renunciation too. From that time on the fame of Samuel the Lion-hunter had spread through East Africa.

But now, five years later, when he returned as a powerful official, hate and distrust awaited the famous friend of the negro. Why did he come disturbing the circles of the dealers? Who told this Christian to overthrow the beautiful screen, the Koran, in whose shadow the Moslem could enslave the black pagans? What had a struggle in Christian America to do with African Mohammedans who knew how to treat their slaves properly, if only because they were worth £5 apiece? And was not the long war between the southern and northern states of America the proof of how necessary, how pleasing to God, the institution was? What was Mr. Baker doing on the Upper Nile in the gilded uniform which the Khedive had presented to him in Cairo?

In gloomy moments, Mr. Baker may well have asked himself the same question. He had come to slay, after all his lions and elephants, that great serpent, the slave-trade, which was rapidly decimating the land he had learned to love on the Upper Nile. Not slavery. He laughed, in his resounding bass, at the declamations of the English Anti-Slavery Societies, and taunted them, saying they would do better to look first to the sufferings of their white brothers in the coal mines.

Baker loved the negro and distrusted the Arab: all his successors felt and acted in the same way. But he did not love the slave as Tolstoy loved him, nor wish to set him

free, like Lincoln. What he wanted to fight against was the trade in men. Among his fellows, the slave bore the lot of the worker: once carried off, he became a piece of goods, a maggoty fruit, often with a brilliant exterior, and in the harem, a creature for lust or laughter: the difference lay less in the question of human happiness than in the question of human dignity. The dark dealings in human flesh were repugnant to him as a gentleman. He had seen the fat pashas in Cairo driving out, accompanied by running *sais* in gilded jackets, and still playing at Arabian Nights. He had heard the whispers of the informers, showing their master, with obsequious cunning, the foot-prints of their escaped comrade, skilled in every toe-mark and every smell. Before his eyes, negro boys had been laid on the sand and castrated with a knifestroke, while the bleeding of the wound was stopped with molten lead. Coptic monasteries lived mainly on the preparation of eunuchs, always a matter of life or death. Of such things, invented and practised by Mohammedans and Christians, the black heathen had remained ignorant.

Baker, the big game hunter turned explorer, developed, as Governor, from an explorer into a ruler. In the country he had begun to explore ten years earlier he founded a province. But he was an isolated individual, and all the Nubians and Egyptians who should have worked for him cheated him, and among his highest officials he discovered traces of the slave-trade. The power of the great slavers seemed not to be overcome.

Among them were men of Napoleonic genius. A Nubian adventurer, without knowledge or money, who had risen by corruption, Zobeir by name, had established a slave-farm on the Upper Nile, had formed his own troops to guard it, had built a kind of citadel with widespread huts, in which he resided surrounded by rugs and silver, and, to impress his visitors,



[Karakashian Bros.]

A HERD OF ELEPHANTS



By permission of the R.A.F.

GAZELLES IN THE DESERT

kept a lion chained at the door. He had nothing to fear from the weak governments in Cairo and their English governor in Khartoum, but he feared the warlike Shilluks, who sought perpetually to attack him, the sudd, the Nile, which might be choked up and cut him off. He might have called himself King Zobeir the First, but his son, an heir to greatness like the sons of the coal magnates who get into the peerage, was the first to assume the title, calling himself "Suleiman, Lord of Bahr-el-Ghazal, Bor, and Mataka." This wholesale dealer in men was invisibly allied with the pashas in Cairo and the officials in Khartoum: they were one in hating the Englishman who came to spoil their business.

Who did not hate in this country? The negro hated the Arab, who took him by surprise, robbed, and sold him, the Arab hated the Turco, saying: "In the footsteps of the Turco, no grass grows." The Turks, scenting their greed for the fruits of the land, hated the Europeans whom the extravagant Khedive had to leave in the country to enable him to cover his debts. Taking another cross-section, the heathen hated the Mohammedan, whose Prophet allowed him to enslave the unbeliever, the Mohammedan hated the Christian, whose prophet forbade him to keep more than one wife. This gamut of general hate ran from black through brown and olive to white, but it by no means took the same way back. For the white man felt closer to the negro, just as a highly intelligent man prefers the company of children to that of all grades of the half-educated.

Amid this glowing lava, Baker stood alone, rather like the pacifists of to-day. At the end of four lost years, he returned home embittered, and might well regard it as a miracle that he returned safe and sound even from this expedition. Ten years later, when the London "Foreign Anti-Slavery Society" was celebrating at its jubilee the end of slavery, and invited

Baker to be the guest of honour, he said, more brusquely than was his wont: "With this horrible and disgraceful picture of cowardice and cant before me, I do not understand the meaning of a jubilee in England."

A single bold saying such as this often ensures an honest man a more lasting place in history than all his deeds.

VIII

His successor was in every way his opposite. The huge heavy and bearded hunter, the warrior and ruler in weight and weapons, was followed as the Khedive's Governor in the Soudan by a small, slight, and active man, with a delicate complexion and hair, very fair, his moustache already half-grizzled, his step light, always on the move, his uniform never according to regulations, with any hat on his head, half-sarcastic, half naïve. His boyish slimness and purity, the healthy colour of his skin, which did not seem to tan in the very midst of the desert, his ease and mobility, would have ensured him no great authority among black and brown men if his steel-blue eyes had not pierced men like an arrow. "He saw with wonderful clearness, though not very far," said a friend of him, and that was borne out by the pure, yet keen look which characterized his being.

Such was General Gordon, whose character is marked by purity and inward light, while he lacked the robust self-assurance with which Baker shot elephants, discovered lakes, and, in the end, saved from Africa the life Gordon lost there. There may be a general tendency to over-rate a man's virtues when his end has been tragic, but they should be used to interpret his nature, for even Gordon, in the last resort, fell as a result of his character. What inspired him,

and kept him productive amid all his doubts, what gave his heart that confidence which speaks in his clear gaze, was a truly romantic relationship to God, which was not unlike Cromwell's, though it was less sombre. While other African explorers, by their constant association with Mohammedans and heathens were in no way strengthened in their Christian faith, Gordon's never wavered, for he was, beside Livingstone, the only real believer among the Afrikanders.

When uncertain whether to advance or stay where he was, he asked the Prophet Isaiah's advice: finding no water in Darfur, he noted an appropriate text from the Second Book of Kings. It seems that he read the Bible every evening for ten or twenty years. His generosity, a direct result of his faith, led him to let an enemy like the cunning Suleiman depart, and the way in which he gave his money away all his life should be enough to dispose of the stupid prejudice of the world against the meanness of the Scot. Once, when he lacked money for the sick about him, he sold the gold medal presented to him by the Emperor of China.

As a commander, such a character could not but be subject to serious extremes of leniency and harshness. After a victory, he confided to his sister, to whom he wrote long letters for half his life, his sympathy with his fallen enemies. As he was too trustful, he overdid punishment when he was cheated, had his subordinates hanged when he found them corrupt, and took for his confidant a negro, who imposed on him. In the very midst of battles and journeys, he, on whom every move depended, would forbid anyone to enter his tent for a whole day at a time, while he consulted the Bible and searched his heart, meditating, "What is moral? What is the freedom of the slave? What is glory?" That he thought about glory so deeply and so long, with so much feeling and so much irony, would be enough to make Gordon lovable.

This Highlander, whose Bible bookmark was a ribbon in the blue, green, and yellow tartan of his own clan, was in reality an officer of the Engineers, but his faith stood so clearly written on his brow, he was, even in youth, so like St. Michael, standing supported on his faith and his sword, that, when a new Messiah arose in China, Captain Gordon was promoted general out of hand to annihilate the false prophet: he did so, and some said later that he had saved China. Between revolts in Stamboul and Commissions in Jerusalem, he always returned to England, built a fort there, went abroad again, apparently never looking at a woman, yet with anything but the unctuous look of a "saint." With his fine, reddish colour, his regular, cheerful features, his splendid eyes, he might be regarded as a flower of Scottish beauty if he were a little bigger. He was forty when he entered the Soudan.

We often find a pure spirit more tolerant towards the criminal than a man of the world, just because crime is so alien to it. In 1874, when Gordon was sent to the Upper Nile by the Khedive Ismail as Governor, so that the country might at last be conquered for Egypt, he was more interested in opening it up than in the struggle for the slaves. He wanted rather to win the negro than to fight the Arab, and once, when he swam across the Nile at the Juba rapids, fearless of the crocodiles, holding his rifle high in his left hand, he had won the reverence of the negroes, on whose lips the saga of the great white swimmer with the rifle sped along the Nile.

But two years later, when Gordon had been promoted to the position of Governor of the whole Soudan, the contrasts there came out just as powerfully as under Baker. Zobeir, the slave king, who had been powerful enough to drive out the kings of Darfur after five centuries of rule, had, like many

an adventurer, weakened in face of the sirens of the legitimate rulers, and been lured to Cairo, where a firm hold was kept on him. When Gordon was trying to make his weaker successor Suleiman see reason, what did he do? He did not summon the rebel to his court of law nor invite him to his house. Nor did he set out against him with strong troops and big guns. He consulted the Bible and acted like a Christian, not like a governor. He rode through the desert with two hundred men, urged on his camel seventy-five miles a day through the blaze, so that he appeared alone, ahead of all, in the presence of his enemy. Then he laid on his golden armour. Slowly he rode into the camp of the slave-dealers and robbers, trusting in his golden cuirass and in God.

Could savages understand such a thing? They did him no harm, the slave-king promised to punish the guilty robbers. When his men arrived, they were given a feast. For a moment, Gordon could believe that justice and order were conquering the sin in the world. But the savages thought him mad. Hardly had he gone when they were at their old tricks. Gessi, a courageous Italian, had now, with genuine armed force and without a golden armour, to take the field against Suleiman, whom he defeated and killed. He liberated the negroes, but too quickly, so that they soon grew insolent: he turned the Arabs out of the province, but they loitered about resentful and bewildered. The revolution came too quickly, the slave-trade and slave-dealers were annihilated locally, but not their cause. The excellent intentions of these men led to the fatal result that every one in the Soudan who had wealth and power became hostile to the Egyptian Government, which had given these Europeans a free hand in the country.

Embittered as Baker had been seven years before, Gordon left the Soudan, and put his talents at the service of British aims in other countries. In the Soudan he had left behind

him a country which, at the end of ten years of British reforms, instead of being purged and reduced to order, was more than ever torn by unrest in the struggle against the Arab Nubian on behalf of the half-freed slave. Every year, the Soudanese grew to hate more deeply a government which had deposed the native kings in order to secure a comfortable life by the extortions of its pashas, while it remained itself remotely distant at the mouth of the Nile. The rich managed to evade taxation, to make fortunes out of slaves and ivory, while the poor merely heard that the Christian dogs were demanding the abolition of the slave-trade from the bankrupt Khedive, and thus already suspected their freedom on account of its doubtful origin. The Egyptian Government took from the traders their rubber and wax, ostriches and rhinoceros hide, monkeys and parrots, and above all ivory, in order to monopolize the sale itself.

When the Khedive's soldiers reached the oases, they quartered themselves on the Bedouin and stayed there till he paid; if he did not, they laid him in the dry river bed or tied him to a tree till his wife brought money or cattle. The soldier who had not had his pay for years had perforce to make something on the tax, and so did the chief, who demanded more from the tribe than the soldier from him. The half nomads preferred to abandon their crops and fled with their herds into the pathless bush. The peasant, who had paid taxes on his field and on every member of his family, preferred to let all lie fallow, moved up the White Nile and turned trader or robber of men and cattle. Everything was taxed—the water-wheel on the Nile, the source of life, the palms, even if they bore nothing, the circumcision of children. But a gold-greedy pasha, whom Gordon himself had already turned out, sat in Khartoum, and proceeded somewhat in the manner of one of his predecessors. He set up a gun, which

he called the "Kadi," the judge: anyone seeking protection who was irksome to him was led before the Kadi, tied to its mouth and blown to pieces.

Such was the state of bondage in the Soudan. The time was ripe for a clever adventurer. In 1880, all the conditions, national and social, necessary for the foundation of a party, were given. The only thing lacking was a popular leader, who should invent a mystic catchword, and millions fell as blindly victim to him as if they had been whites.

IX

Mohamed Achmed was poor in his childhood, and had suffered humiliation in his youth. Like most upstarts, he had been lucky enough to begin with a failure, and to win strength from it by defiant effort. The son of a poor Nubian, who built palm-wood boats between the cataracts in Dongola, he had, as the pupil of a sheik, learned nothing save to reel off the ninety-nine names of the Prophet; later he learned to read and write, so that he could carry on a trade in little talismans in the form of strips of paper against witchcraft and disease, which brought him in just enough to live on. One day, when he had turned on his teacher in disobedience, the latter, in a rage, threw him into the sheba, the pillory, upon which the young man humbly asked for pardon. The infuriated teacher would not relent. Then Mohamed left him and departed to serve his deadly enemy, the head of another Koran school.

In thus beginning his career as a renegade, he discovered, in his warm welcome in the enemy camp, three facts about himself which might come in very useful: his name was

Mohamed, he had fine eyes and silky hair, while on his right cheek he had a birthmark and in his mouth a striking gap in his teeth. As he saw that his indignant and desperate people lacked a leader, and as he was himself a clever speaker, it seemed to him not impossible that he might play a part, perhaps a great one. First of all, it was necessary to become a saint and a hermit. But where could one be visible to all and yet live in the interesting retreat of a fakir? Where could one live lonely as a saint, with the world fully aware of the fact?

Then he called to mind an uncle who built boats, like his father, on one of the big islands in the Nile above Khartoum. This island was admirably situated for a hermit, being quite central and visible. There, where all boats passed, and many put in for repairs, where the Mecca pilgrims from the west, the slave-dealers from the south passed by, Mohamed set up as a saint, eating nothing but fruit and vegetables, presenting his two wives as his washerwomen, filling up his time with reciting suras, tending his long hair, and censing himself with precious ambra, so that he delighted all the curious, especially the women, with his perfume. In a few years' time, the saint of Abba Island was known everywhere, children came to see the pretty birthmark and kiss his snow-white robe, women, to compare themselves with the wives of the saint, soldiers, to get talismans against the spears of the heathen, peasants, to save their cattle from the pest. When he distributed the gifts they brought him among the poor of the island, they called him "The Self-Denier," all unknowing that it was just the poor of the island who fed him. On the rare occasions when he crossed the Nile, to wander on the shore with his beggar's cup, softly singing or reciting, they called him "Father Gaptooth," and all bowed before him.

Patience, the great faculty of the Oriental, which makes him a more astute diplomat than the nerve-ridden men of the west, and a silent observation of the growing unrest, of which news was brought to him by the boatmen casting anchor from all parts of the Soudan, made Mohamed quietly bide the day on which he first announced to his disciples on the island that the Messiah prophesied by the Koran, the Expected Mahdi, would soon appear. For centuries past, whenever revolution broke out in the lands of Islam, there was always somebody to proclaim the Expected Mahdi, that is, the Prophet renewed in eternal return, and generally ready to take the part himself. The Mahdi will appear, Mohamed had prophesied. The Mahdi will appear, all repeated. Who is the Mahdi?

The authorities in Khartoum suspected nothing. On the contrary, the Governor prohibited his steamers from taking wood from the Island of Abba, ordered them to slow down in passing and to call the travellers to prayer with long whistles of the siren, and when a high Coptic official landed, and was entertained with sugar-water by the handsome gaunt apostle, it seemed to him that his jug did not empty, and he related the miracle to the astonishment of the pashas.

When Mohamed discerned the stupidity of the authorities, the disputes of the party-leaders and the growing distress of the masses all round him, when he saw that he only needed to believe in himself to make the others believe in him, he resolved to ordain himself Mahdi. One evening, gathering his disciples under the shade of the palms on his island, he told them of his vision of the night before. The Prophet Mohammed, in a shining green robe, had descended towards him, angels, in a radiant circle, had surrounded him, with all the saints and those in glory, and Mohammed had spoken to him: "Lo! Here is the Mahdi, the mighty one. He who

does not believe in him does not believe in God and in me." The disciples lay silent and shaken before their saint. But Mohamed said:

"Know, my friends, that I am the Expected Mahdi!" These men and women were the first to kneel before him, for now he revealed to them that he was of the race of the Prophet and therefore bore his name, and that Allah had branded him as his Chosen by the scar on his face. Hundreds were ready to believe in him at once, but he needed a million to lead his party to victory. In Arabic, Mahdi means "The Leader." The Mahdi now abandoned his saintly pose, grasped—figuratively at first—the sword, and sent his disciples through all the country round about with letters and messages proclaiming his magic accession.

"In the name of Allah, the gracious and merciful, praise be to the noble Ruler and blessings upon our Lord Mohammed and his race. And this is written by the servant of his Lord, by Mohamed the Mahdi . . . to his beloved friends in God and to all who follow him to restore and increase the faith. . . . Know that God has called me to the Caliphate and that the Prophet has proclaimed that I am the Expected Mahdi, and has placed me on his throne above nobles and princes, and God has surrounded me with his angels and his prophets. . . . And he has also said: 'God has set upon thee the sign of thy mission,' and to show all peoples that I am the Expected Mahdi, he has branded my right cheek with a mark of beauty. And another sign he gave unto me, and that is, that out of the light a banner shall appear, to be with me in the hour of battle, which is borne by the angel Asrael, the angel of death, the destroyer of my enemies. And he has given me to know that he who doubts my mission . . . he who is against me is an unbeliever, and whoever makes war on me shall be abandoned and without comfort in both dwellings, and that

his goods and his children shall be forfeit to the faithful. Therefore, choose! Peace be unto ye!"

Thus the Mahdi had not only invented his divine mission: he had at the same time threatened his doubters and critics, and all in the name of God. As the Koran is also a code of civil law, and as the sheiks, its interpreters, are also lawyers, his creed backed up his politics, and the Koran, better suited to dictators than the Bible, forthwith provided the new leader with the desired commandment: "Slay them who would slay you. Slay them where you find them."

The steps taken by the Governor, Gordon's successor, were too timid and too tardy. To an adjutant, who was sent to the island to summon the Mahdi to Khartoum, the latter replied:

"I am the Mahdi. The Pasha shall believe in me."

"How can you prove that?"

"My time is not yet come."

"Soldiers will be sent out against you."

"The Nile will swallow them up."

When a steamer came up-Nile with three hundred men and a gun, and moored by the bank opposite the island, three officers were disputing the command, the troops, ignorant of the place, groped about before sunrise, while the Mahdi's disciples, who knew every stone, fell upon them, the gunner on board could at first find neither powder nor shot, then fired in the air, and the expedition, with half of its men, returned defeated to Khartoum. The news of the Mahdi's wonderful victory spread throughout the Soudan.

Now the leader set out to establish his party, as far as possible, with all ranks and classes. To the poor he preached communist doctrines, the breaking of the bondage of tribute, the extermination of the big landowners, the praise of the peasant, upon which a number of rich men were killed and

robbed. But at the same time he was able to court capital on religious pretexts by denouncing the Turks and Albanians, that is, the tax-gatherers and governors, as unworthy Moslems, who therefore need not be obeyed. By playing on national and social feelings at the same time, the Mahdi was able for a moment to unite under his flag warring classes and interests. The rich Nubians laughed at him, but they joined him, because he seemed to be protecting their property from anarchy: the beggars banked on his communistic catch-words: the Arabs clung to the new permission for slave-dealing, and the negroes, who had soon grown discontented with their white liberators, because they still had to work for them, hailed in their old enemies, the Baggara, and their leader the liberators from the whites. In a general state of despair, new hope had sprung in every heart.

The Mahdi's first concern was a new flag, for he, a half-savage himself, fully realized its importance for half-savages. Its green and red waved before him everywhere as he travelled through the triangle between the Blue and White Niles or over to Darfur. While his party swelled, promising everything to everybody, he looked about for two helpers capable of wielding the sword and beating the drum for him. Though at first he had conducted his own publicity, now, adored by thousands, he needed a special manager for it. Professions, however, not being highly specialized there, he found both functions combined in a slightly pockmarked Bedouin with a big nose, Abdullahi by name, a man rather older than the Mahdi who was, in 1881, only thirty-three. Belonging, as a Baggara, to the boldest tribe in Nubia, uprooted, with his kin and his friends, by the chaos of the last decades, a failure, hence ready for anything, this warrior pledged himself to the saint, the sword superseded the word, and the great dervish drum, which from now on rolled through the Soudan,

provided a natural transition from advertisement to arms by belonging to both.

The Mahdi's next care was ceremonies and uniforms, the real instruments of a popular movement among savages, white and black. The dervishes—thus the rapidly formed army of the party-leader was called—wore white shirts, djibbahs, with gaudy patches sewn on them; the oath to the leader was taken with folded hands. Abdullahi, the Khalifa of the Mahdi, followed his friend and leader on all his ways with a black flag, praying aloud. This warrior cared for nothing but the war against the "Turcos," who had humiliated his tribe, and defrauded them of their herds by taxation. And while the dervish drum was drawing men from their huts to join the disorder and swell the warlike movement, the dervishes, breathless and beside themselves with running and shouting, cried the names of Allah and fell into a kind of screaming frenzy.

While, as a national leader, he preached the simplicity of old customs, Mohamed imprisoned all who did not believe in him, confiscated the property of those who did not support him, reintroduced the death-penalty by hanging, and saw to it that thousands of rhino whips should provide for greater zeal in the faith. At the same time he maintained his sainthood, and made hundreds of devoted priests spread abroad that he was the twelfth Imam announced in the Koran, for whom the Moslem world had been waiting for twelve centuries, sent to purify the faith and win the world for his teaching. The Holy War was proclaimed. And while the women were finding mystic signs on the eggs in their poultry yards, which the busy dervishes interpreted as the Arab cipher of the leader, he himself contrived to shake his visitors with alternate tears and laughter, until later a Greek (according to Gordon's diary) declared that he had seen the pepper under

the Mahdi's finger-nails by which, putting his fingers to his eyes, he could provoke tears at any moment.

Where the legend did not fit him, the Mahdi twisted it until it did. He could hardly command the Euphrates, which was to dry up at his appearance, revealing mounds of gold in its bed, but Mount Masa, in the Atlas, from which the new Mahdi was to descend, could be transformed into the Soudanese Mount Gadir, provided the visions were forthcoming. And here Mohamed actually went to the mountain, even though it was not the right one, accompanied by thousands, who camped on the slopes, an army with women and children, who, however, were not, as they generally are in the field, a nuisance, but fanned the flame of fanaticism with their screaming. The Mahdi himself had many beautiful daughters presented to him by his devotees as wives, and their tents were grouped round his own on the mountain; all the same he continued to play the saint.

In the Mahdi's sermons on the mount, some of which were oral, some written, and in manifestoes carried far and wide by the troops on their lances he drew further attention to his descent and birthmark, the source of his moral power, proved that all the signs were fulfilled and even replaced the thousand-year old cry "Allah is Allah and Mohammed is his prophet" by a new one: "and Mohamed Achmed is his prophet." This Mahdi was perhaps the first modern tribune of the people to recognize that a fabrication, repeated often enough, acquires the appearance of truth.

At the same time, like the Prophet before him, he appointed four caliphs, each of whom had sub-leaders under him, with a complicated system of multi-coloured flags.

While these ceremonies, sermons, and flag-wavings were going on, the Khalifa collected a gigantic army from the whole of the Soudan.

X

In Cairo, the English had quelled the chaos in their own favour. During a revolt, they bombarded Alexandria, and, declaring that order must be restored, took the power into their own hands. After so great a victory, they seemed disposed to withdraw—that means to withdraw docile Egypt—from the Soudan. And yet it was a British colonel, then in Egyptian service, who, warned by his government, opposed by the majority of the Egyptian officers, collected an army against the Mahdi to liberate the Soudan.

From the outset, Hicks was lost. Ignorant of the language of the country, dependent for guides on Bedouins, who led him astray, what good were his modern weapons in desert and guerilla warfare? In the decisive encounter, the tokens of two epochs came out clear, for the Egyptians, with their modern arms which, it is true, they did not all know how to use, charged an army whose leaders came galloping along in armour and coats of mail, in armlets and greaves, like the Crusaders, followed by screaming Soudanese, dancing and waving their spears and by naked negroes, casting their bows in the air. An English officer, in trim khaki, armed with the most up-to-date pistols, advanced on a Nubian prince who, in gaudy festal garments, with a silk turban, spurred his Arab horse against him, brandishing a great scimitar, and every time the Nubian was the victor.

In any case, by the end of the fight, the Egyptian army lay beaten in the sand, while the heads of the leaders were taken as trophies of victory. Colonel Hicks was one of the last to fall. Three hundred are said to have escaped.

After the victory, the Mahdi had become the hero of all hearts, and master of nearly the whole of the Soudan. When

he entered El Obeid and crossed the Nile as victor, the rotting head of the English colonel was borne before him on a dervish spear, and lowered to kiss the earth before the horse of the cunning adventurer weeks after his death. The sword carried before the Mahdi, presented by the Sultan of Darfur, bore, though nobody could read it, the inscription: "Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor." Once it had belonged to some belated Crusader, who had perhaps fought against the corsairs in Algeria, had fallen at his death into the hands of savage tribes, and, by the ways of legend, had reached the deserts of the Soudan. Thus the weapon of the All-Christian Emperor, in the hands of a Nubian Moslem, triumphed over the Christian Pasha.

In the face of such triumphs, the Mahdi began to believe in his own mission. Adored by all, he forgot his caution, took his pleasure in growing numbers of women, and put on flesh visibly. In his swelling megalomania, he had a man punished for putting Allah above the Mahdi—it was true, but the tone was insulting. Now he wore a yellow silk mantle with his green turban, was mild or Draconian as the fit took him, while the Khalifa, a kind of prime minister, busied himself with still more patches on his uniform, and had an ivory horn blown before him when he rode out. Both men succumbed to temptation, the one of adoration, the other of physical violence. As long as the Mahdi was simply striving for power, he was a clever tactician who, turning to account the outward distress and inward mystic yearnings of his people, sought to achieve their rise from poverty and humiliation, and to rule with Draconian severity a mob blinded with promises. When, under the rustling of his own flag, amid the hysterical cries of the crowd, amid men prostrate and worshipping before him, he began to doubt his mere cleverness and to believe in his divine mission, he lost his balance, revelled in

processions and ceremonies, in death sentences and royal whims, in speeches upon speeches. Therefore Allah soon took his life.

It was in November 1883. Gladstone and Bismarck, Queen Victoria and Wilhelm I, Crispi and Umberto, Alexander III, Francis Joseph, Leo XIII were ruling Europe. Save for Russia, all were interested in the partition of Africa: a considerable part had already been distributed. Egypt's collapse in money and military power had been the signal for a dash to East Africa. With the exception of Abyssinia, the natural fortress, the whole continent lay open for the white powers to snatch; the only thing was to get there first. It should be easy to dispose of the Arabs and negroes.

Suddenly a monstrous thing had happened. English officers, Egyptian troops trained by the English, had been beaten by a horde of Bedouins and peasants, Nubians and negroes, had had their heads cut off and had been insulted even in death. Egypt, for which England was in vain seeking to shift the responsibility which her suzerainty involved, had been driven from the Middle and Upper Nile, which she had had the power if not to rule, then at least to dominate, for sixty years. For centuries, Christian Europe had suffered no such blow from savage peoples. An Austrian and an Englishman, Slatin and Lupton, Governors of two Soudan provinces, pashas by the grace of the Khedive, had not only surrendered, they had had to kneel before the Mahdi, repeat his oath, renounce Christianity, swear the Holy War against the Christian dogs. The sons of citizens of Vienna and London, Excellencies in glittering uniforms, had become the slaves Abd-el-Kader and Abdullah, who had to run barefoot by the side of the decorated horse on which the Mahdi rode through bush and streets. Would this not be the signal for other coloured tribes to break the invisible yoke in which the white lords held them bound?

Still, the prevailing feeling at the time was not yet revenge. The number of European prisoners was small, their person obscure, the news vague. Looked at from Egypt, where Baring (Lord Cromer) had been High Commissioner for a year, the desert lay between the troops and the revolt—and what kind of troops was it that had just been defeated? Ill-armed, ill-trained, without enthusiasm. Liberal influences in England, which were out to restrict colonial expansion, supported the aged Gladstone, who was not interested in Africa. It was therefore decided to abandon the Soudan and withdraw the garrison from Khartoum. That needed a man who knew it as an officer and yet was philosopher enough to withdraw without glory. Such renunciation could not be expected of Baker the lion-hunter. A rather crazier creature had to be found. Gordon was found.

But Gordon, like Hamlet, was but mad north-north-west. It was never certain what he would do at the critical moment, and it was still less certain whether he would obey orders. Yet just on that account he seemed the right man to a disunited government and an uncertain public opinion. "The Soudan," he said once, "is a woman who has separated from her Egyptian husband. If she wants to marry again, let her. Then something can be done with her."

Since his return from Khartoum, five years before, he had almost disappeared, had been busy again in China and India, in Cape Colony and Mauritius, had spent a year in the Holy Land, and in between, had repeatedly turned up in Scotland, his home country; years without outward experiences had been rich in inward experience, to which his letters bear witness. He was about to return to Africa, though not in British service, but in that of Leopold of Belgium to the Congo, to the opening up of which Stanley had just given fresh impetus.

But hardly had he been summoned from Brussels to London when he let his chances on the Congo go, accepted, in an interview, the commission of the nation, which was passed on from Baker to Gordon. Even now Gordon's advice did not sound like evacuation: the Mahdi in Khartoum, he wrote, on the contrary, would mean a relapse into slavery and a menace to Egypt. All the same, the very ministers who distrusted him appointed him, and even Lord Cromer, who did not want a former Governor to have to carry out the retreat, had to yield; public opinion, England's dictator, bore Gordon up. Only old Gladstone was invisible, having wired his consent in so vital a question at the instance of three ministers. The wishes of the nation accompanied Gordon's journey, as though he were setting out to conquer a country, not to abandon one.

What was in Gordon's mind when he accepted the commission? He had to bring the white people and the officials from Khartoum into safety, to withdraw the troops, leave behind him some kind of government, and be the last white man to turn his back on the Soudan. A few days before his appointment, he had publicly advised the contrary. It could not escape him, as an officer, that he alone, unarmed, and with the prospect of the very few troops there, was going through the desert into a country in which the native army, once he had passed the cataracts, could shut him up in his capital from the north, and hence shut him off from the world. As a politician, a man who knew the country, he knew the power of a fanaticized mob, the hate of the Christian, and of any messenger from Egypt.

But General Gordon was a Crusader, sustained by the Bible and the sword: he was a philosopher and a puritan, sustained by his spirit and his conscience, and even if he had the tolerance to recognize God in a hundred forms, he had, all his life, been moved by the thought of glory, which he

fought in himself as too worldly, and rechristened duty, like many a Christian before him. He was now fifty. A life lay behind him, rich in deeds, diverse in form, and scattered over many lands. With worthless equipment, without a firm supporter in the Cabinet, half distrusted by Cromer in Cairo, wholly distrusted by Gladstone in London, Gordon, a General Staff man, engineer and Governor, an expert on the desert and the Nile, like all his predecessors, was drawn back to Africa, back to his work, his soldiers and negroes, urged on to deeds, perhaps to death.

In Khartoum, after five years of absence, Gordon found that the moral and political power he and Baker had built up was destroyed. There must have been a plucky heart in the body of the man who all the same took no advantage of his Government's instructions to retreat as soon as he could. The endless telegrams he sent to Cairo, communicating his decisions, though the detail varied, all betrayed the fundamental determination not to surrender the country and the town. How was he to bring away nearly sixty thousand people, officials, troops, soldiers, women, without transport or resources? Or was he simply to abandon them, while they all looked up to him at his arrival as the saviour prophet of the Bible? Both practical and moral considerations made it impossible in every way to carry out the order. Gordon acted as an officer—he fortified Khartoum, completed a canal three miles long by which his predecessor had again attempted to connect the White and Blue Niles, so that the town lay on an island, the trunk of the elephant was cut off. On the islands, he set up forts, took advantage of the rise of the Nile, which made it difficult to attack the town, threw out trenches, drilled troops, and only kept them by the promise of an army of reinforcement in which he did not himself believe.

In such a situation, the officer in him had to send the

puritan on leave, rather as Cromwell had done. Gordon did not merely have the whips and irons used by his Egyptian predecessors and successors destroyed before his palace: he abolished the prohibition of slavery so as to deprive the Mahdi of a trump card. He even tried to bring back to Khar-toum the slave-king Zobeir, who was still detained in Cairo, and in him to put into power the only Soudanese who could resist the Mahdi. But this truly statesmanlike idea was rejected in London because the Anti-Slavery Society—gentlemen who had never been among savages and who moralized instead of thinking—worked public opinion up against the slave-dealer. Gordon was driven to such paradoxes that he, the liberator of the slaves, in vain called for the slave-king to save the situation, much as Gustavus Adolphus, towards the end of his life, outraged the tolerance of his own church.

What was to be done? Proclaim that the country would be restored to its ancient kings? Too late. Go and visit the Mahdi in his golden armour, as he had once visited the slave-king? The crazy scheme hung in the balance, but then he might have run, a third noble slave, beside the Mahdi's horse. First he wrote him a letter offering him the Sultanate of Kordofan. The tribune of the people knew how to counter such things with caution. In his refusal, saying that no mortal could offer him power, the new Mohamed quoted to the Scottish puritan the Jewish King Solomon, who said to the Queen of Sheba: "You bring me gold, but what God has bestowed upon me is better than your gift," and continued with the taunt: "You are a people which loves gifts. But I shall come with an invisible army and drive you from your town into contempt and misery." The Mahdi even attempted to quote Jesus, who is, after all, a great prophet in the Koran, but Gordon, sure of his Bible, declared that there was no such passage.

The Mahdi had added a gift to his letter—a poor dervish shirt, trousers, turban, a girdle of palm-straw and a rosary, and wrote: “This is the clothing of them who renounce the world and its vanities and look towards the world that is to come, towards eternal Paradise. If you really desire God and a blessed life, put on these garments and come to me, then you shall have eternal blessedness.” The ascetic who wrote this then had a harem of over a hundred women.

Gordon smiled and noted in his diary: “It seems to me that the Mohammedan fears God just as truly as we do, and if he is honest, he is just as good a Christian. We ourselves are all heathens, more or less.” So far the tolerant philosopher in private. But the Governor, in a solemn convocation of the last notables in Khartoum, read the Mahdi’s letter, then threw the false penitential shirt on the ground and trampled on it with his soldier’s boots.

After this parley, the two enemies took up their positions: the tribes north of Khartoum, feeling themselves threatened by Gordon in the south and the promised troops in the north, now joined the Mahdi for good and all, shutting off the capital from the north. Fifty thousand dervishes cut off a solitary Englishman with a remnant of troops from the world, though not entirely, for the wire on the Nile was still guarded, and the wire had at last promised men.

Could relief reach him? The British Government was irresolute, the Egyptian powerless. Probably Gladstone bore a grudge against the man who had forced him into this military adventure by transgressing his orders, and a grudge against his colleagues, who had sent the man out in the hope that he would transgress his orders. While Gladstone delayed with the relief, to force Gordon to return, Gordon remained in Khartoum to secure the Soudan, and as he thought, Egypt with it, for England. Not until August 1884, under the

pressure of the London press, did the other wing of the Cabinet prevail, and the troops which, had they been sent out in May, could have saved the situation, left three months too late.

Gordon saw the delay, saw its fatal consequences approaching, and now he spoke the truth over the wire: he would, he wired to Lord Cromer, from now on act as circumstances required, and take the decision into his own hands: perhaps he would go to the equator, "leaving to you the ineradicable shame of having left the garrison in the lurch." In his diary he wrote: "We are an honest people, but our diplomats are conies and not officially honest." But as the man of reason judges the fanatic more equitably than the fanatic the man of reason, Lord Cromer swallowed the insult, and later praised Gordon for being free from a national vice which "if not hypocrisy, is closely related to it."

The Nile joined with Gladstone to prevent Gordon's relief. A detachment which Gordon sent down the river to Dongola was exterminated because the steamer was dashed to pieces at a cataract and all the survivors were massacred by the dervishes. In autumn, the race between the black prophet and the white believer began: the Khalifa concentrated increasing numbers of troops round Khartoum, the Governor strove to turn the desert city into a fortress, had earthworks thrown up, stretched canvas across them, had bread baked of palm bark and gum arabic, at the same time rationing all supplies and having money coined. Above all, he kept everybody's spirits up, for he and he alone was the hope of thousands who saw the circle round them drawing ever closer, and a dreadful death before them if the English came too late.

Over in Omdurman, on the other side of the White Nile, which he had taken in December, sat the Mahdi, and when he issued from his harem, which seemed to occupy more

and more of his time, he could, from a terrace beside the dome of his white Arab house, descry away over the Nile the roof of the Gothic palace in which his enemy held sway—for how long? He may even have recognized his silhouette through his field-glass, for Gordon sat for hours at a time on his roof, the highest point in the town, always looking north, from which, an African Tristan, he expected the rescuing ship—or perhaps expected it no longer. Was he already in the mood of one prophetically inspired—*moriturus*—only half-heartedly desiring rescue? In varying moods, he passed every free minute of his day with his diary, more than ever since the telegraph wire had been cut, drew caricatures of Cromer and the ministers round the edge, lauded, an all-too Platonic general, every cunning move of his enemy, and yet never let his energy flag when he thought of all those who were counting on him.

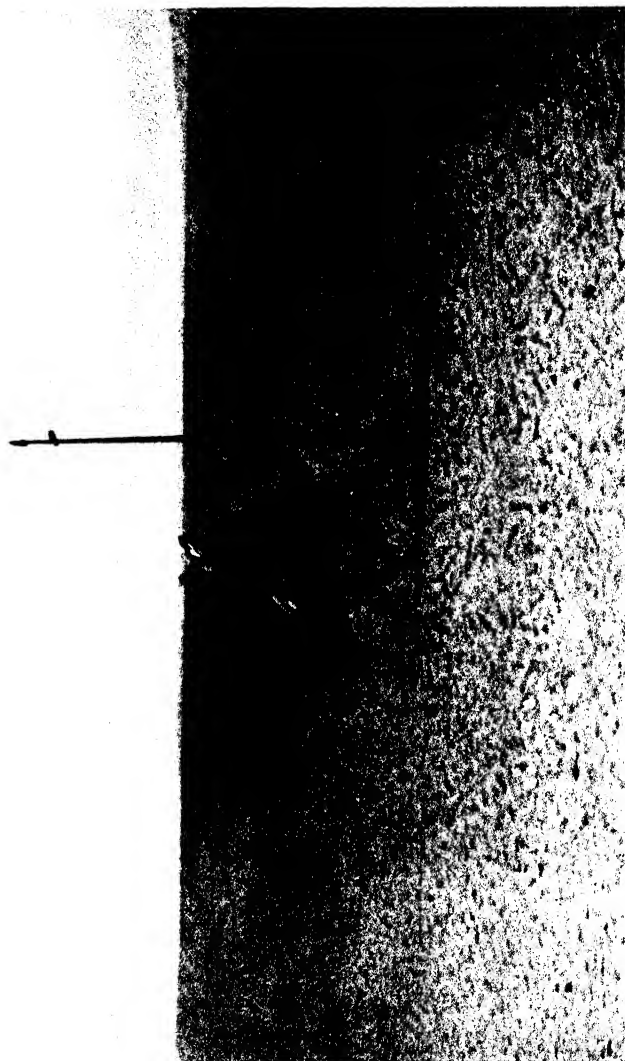
In the end, even the Nile betrayed him: by running lower than in former winters, it undermined the fortress wall; between the wall and the river a swamp arose which only protected the besieged until it dried up. Hunger grew: the streets lay full of the bodies of men and camels, the vultures screamed over the town, but no steamship whistle sounded in the lost fortress. To show the besieged that their chief did not fear the Mahdi's guns, Gordon lit up all the windows of his palace. In these last weeks of his life, his fine curly hair literally turned white. "This may be the last letter," he wrote to his sister a fortnight before the end. "The expedition has delayed too long. Well, God guides all. His will be done. I am quite happy. Thank God, I have tried to do my duty."

The little army from the north had bad luck on the river, and hesitated many days. The dervishes, who knew every rapid, lay hidden in the bush and fired at the steamers, whose crews had to stop repeatedly to take water-wheels from the



[Morhig, Khartoum

SANDSTORM OVER KHARTOUM



OLD AND NEW

banks for firewood. Then, at the southernmost point of the loop, the English set out to march through the desert to Khartoum. When the Khalifa saw that the enemy was only a few days off, he ordered a storm on the town he had besieged for three hundred days. In the morning, from the roof of his palace, Gordon saw the dervish army approaching.

Though he had once resolved to kill himself in such a situation, in the end he felt religious scruples—he must die a martyr. In superb composure, at the end, recollecting at the last moment the dignity he represented as the last Englishman in the palace, he put on his white dress uniform, took his sword and revolver, and when the first enemy broke down the gate, came armed and alone down the stairs. For a few seconds, the group of gaudy dervishes stood before the white apparition, with a last remainder of respect for the Governor. Then one shouted: “Kill him, the enemy of God.” The first spear came flying, Gordon made a contemptuous gesture. Witnesses later examined in court said he had come fighting, sword in hand, downstairs, carving a way for himself to the door, only then to fall before the swords and daggers. His head was brought to the Mahdi as a trophy and set up in front of his house on a spear for the people to pelt with stones. Then a great massacre began in Khartoum.

On the following day, the comfortable prophet came across the junction of the two Niles on Gordon's steamer, contemplated the headless corpse of his enemy, the streets which lay full of the bodies of the last white men and Egyptians, the women, tortured to betray the hiding-place of their buried treasures, slaves, trampling about on the still living bodies of their masters, dogs soaked, along with their masters, in brandy and set on fire, a death-dance of delirious humanity which, for half a century of enslavement, took a revenge which swelled to madness. Among the captive girls and boys,

the Mahdi had the first, the Khalifa the second choice. The latter had Gordon's bath-tub and looking-glass brought to his palace. For they all remained in Omdurman, their own town, while Khartoum sank in ashes.

Two days after the capture, Scottish troops, many of them kilted with Gordon's own tartan, reached the Island of Tuti, were received with gunfire, retired precipitately, and came to grief again in the cataracts. Only a few managed to escape and bring the news to the camp set up downstream, pale as the messenger at the end of a Greek tragedy.

The Mahdi, who had grown fat and bloated in the last few years survived his victory by four months. Beside the house of the ascetic a whole row of women's houses had arisen, many full of gold and Maria Theresa dollars, while gigantic heaps of dhurra were piled up as if he feared famine, and among them lay the grotesque loot of the treasures of Europe—lamps, tinned food, printing presses and a magic lantern, believed to be part of the Christian sorcerers' stock-in-trade.

But what was the Mahdi to do with the conquered Soudan? He sent messengers to all foreign countries, calling on them to believe in the Prophet: at times he preached to the people as of old, but now it was a mere form, for he had long since succumbed to gluttony, let his Khalifa rule, and was more occupied with the lovely Aminta, whose father and husband had been murdered in Khartoum, than with the disputes of the dervishes, who were quarrelling with the younger party members for money and office.

In public, the Mahdi still wore his linen robe, but inside his house, he wore costly stuffs, and when he reclined on brocade cushions, a few of his wives stood behind him with ostrich-feather fans, others massaged him, and the nearer to him they stood, the more costly were their garments. To the faithful outside they sold the water he had washed in, and

little sacks containing the earth his foot had trod, till he died, perhaps poisoned by his lovely Aminta, perhaps only of fat, after a death-agony six days long.

Faithful, bold, and noble, a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*, Gordon, upright and alone, had fallen amid a thousand lances. A bloated colossus, surrounded by women and gold, the cunning tribune of the people followed him. One left behind him a curse, the other a legend.

XI

The Nile was in the hands of savage tribes which were trying to block it. What would become of Egypt then? And even if the river still flowed, even if the silt of the Blue Nile still fertilized the land, would these hordes not move downstream one day, like their fathers two or three thousand years before them, occupy Egypt, guard the Red Sea coasts, and keep the British ships away from India? Was anything impossible after all that had happened?

Europe, in terror, saw its plan for the partition of Africa become doubtful. In England especially, the imperialists now had a hero, for whose memory it was incumbent upon them to take up the struggle and exact vengeance. Gordon dead rose to be a political factor, the strength of which he had perhaps foreseen in one of those lonely hours on the roof of his palace. When a nation has been guilty of a dereliction of duty towards one of its subjects who has fallen in the breach, it tends to do rather too much for his memory so as to dispose of him once for all. All motives co-operated to bring on the campaign which England had neglected after the defeat of Colonel Hicks.

And yet much time was to pass. During the years 1885-1898, the Khalifa dominated the Soudan, or at any rate strove

to terrorize it by despotism. The first act of the new leader was to assassinate at one blow part of the family of the old, which was in his way. Then he threatened Upper Egypt in the north, the negroes in the south, Darfur in the west, Abyssinia in the east, and while he was thus fighting on all sides with varying fortunes, the white neighbours of the Soudan, England, France, and Belgium, could break off bit by bit without a struggle.

Not until eleven years after Gordon's death did an event force a decision in England. When, in March 1896, the Italians had suffered a crushing defeat at Adua from the Negus Menilek, even the Liberals in England realized that Great Britain would have to act, or else make up her mind to abandon colonies altogether. Two coloured states in East Africa, then at war, yet neighbours, and hence perhaps allies the next day, had defeated two white powers, England and Italy. Now the time to act had come: twelve days after the battle of Adua, the advance into the Soudan was decided in London.

It was a universal resolve. At that time Africa was as good as entirely partitioned. Whichever country took the Soudan could consolidate its colonial empire for purposes of trade and war, less for the sake of its products than to obtain a land of transit, France to the west, England to the south. England had reasons and pretexts enough to take care of Egypt, which she had seized shortly before with the obvious intention of not letting it go again. Thus a situation arose which allowed England to appear in a threefold chivalrous guise; as the saviour from anarchy, the protector of the Egyptian states, and the avenger of the murdered Gordon, while at the same time she could check the expansion of France or Germany from the west and south. Though it has lately become the fashion to cast doubts on English sagacity, and to speak of luck

and chance, it must be recognized that here English statesmanship was far-seeing, and in that spirit the enterprise was carried out.

In the Soudan flowed the Nile, the source of Egypt's life, and if a high English official writes, even to-day, that England could not "expose Egypt to the danger of the occupation of the Upper Nile by a third power," such a statement merely reveals the desire for power inspiring all annexation on the part of a country which can still hope for success in colonial wars. Thus the British Lohengrin sallied forth to rescue the Egyptian Elsa from her perils, yet at the same time to win the right of her hand, that is, to her beauty and her fortune, which is generally the way of such mythological knights.

England profited by her experiences: this second campaign in the Soudan was not to cost as much in men and money as the first, but it had to be victorious. This time Egypt, for whose salvation the whole thing was ostensibly undertaken, had to provide both men and money, and thus the new campaign cost the English only a tenth part of those thirteen million pounds which had been squandered in the fight with the Mahdi. Victories generally come cheaper than defeats.

In this case, the gods had literally set the sweat and labour of the day before the crown. From the Egyptian frontier to Khartoum, from the twenty-second to the sixteenth parallel, stretched the almost waterless desert. This had to be crossed by a railway, for to venture on the Nile, with its rapids, its shallows and its great loop, was to plunge into the same danger as Hicks and Gordon. If the Nile was the objective of the campaign, it was to be an instrument of conquest too, but it could not be the route of advance. The only possible way was a railway through the desert. As there were here neither mountains nor rivers to be crossed, as neither tunnels nor many bridges were necessary, the building of the railway,

being a test rather of energy than technique, was quite properly conducted by officers. The enemy to be overcome by these railway builders was not the land but the climate, which only the iron will of the soldier at work could cope with.

The commander in the desert was a big, muscular, and decidedly smart officer in the middle forties, sunburnt, with a full head of hair and a serious expression, elastic in his movements, especially on horseback. Once one realized that his squint was not of mental origin, but was due to a paralysis of the upper muscle of the left eye, it no longer aroused suspicion, but his icy, misanthropic manner, his domineering muteness did not, for all that, make him likeable, and whoever had once shaken hands with him remembered all his life the man who, in shaking hands, sought not to please, but to impress.

A lonely youth, a private education without school or club, had, at his first, rare meetings with officers of his own age, fired his ambition, and the unsociability which now wrapped him in had confirmed in him his serious conception of the service. Always solitary, whether drawing maps in Cyprus or designing bridges in Palestine, with a Prussian faith in duty, offended by the slightest criticism, and at once at his desk to complain of his superiors in London, he was liked by few—even women—preferred to be feared rather than to be loved, and in his lifetime was defended by few friends, but by them passionately. He had trained himself as a soldier and horseman in many an African fight, and nearly lost his chin in a skirmish on the Red Sea. When this born autocrat was later called inhuman in high places, he became still more defiant and regarded with satisfaction the growing number of his opponents. As he listened to nobody, he could make no use of advice, only carried out what he had planned himself, and brought it to a brilliant conclusion.

Such was the nature of the man who built the railway through the desert, beat down the dervishes, and conquered the Soudan for his country. Kitchener, who, happening to be on leave, had been present at the bombardment of Alexandria, had become Chief of Staff at the formation of the new Egyptian army, and had soon after tried everything to rescue Gordon by an expedition. Seen in the light of his later achievements, he might have been the man to relieve Gordon, and the thought may well have brought a certain confusion into his secret meditations as he sat solitary on his camel beside his lengthening railway and reflected on the vagaries of a fate which had made him the avenger of the man he had not been allowed to save.

Thoughts of this kind may often have moved him, for Kitchener was a fatalist, as far as fatalism is compatible with so great an ambition. This natural bias seems to have kept him in the East and to have been reinforced by his dealings with Mohammedans. This rigorous Englishman took from the Arabs, whose language he knew fairly well, what was congenial to him, the belief in fate, the refusal to enter upon any argument with his men, and a naïve pleasure in the productions of Oriental craftsmanship, which he collected and later, when he returned from the market to his palace in Cairo, would carry carefully upstairs with his own hands. That and a romantic garden which he laid out on an island in the Nile opposite Assouan were the only relaxations his tense ambition allowed, and in later years, when the post came in, he would push everything aside to read first his gardener's report of his island. He meant, as an old man, to wander through dreaming rose-walks, still solitary, but no longer at work. In 1916, a German mine killed him on his ship, in the very midst of his greatest work, as he was setting out to save Russia for the Entente.

When Kitchener began his railway through the desert, the eternal experts in London declared the whole scheme mad. When he sketched his plan with a lieutenant in his tent by Wadi Halfa, a comprehensive training of the Egyptian troops, especially the Soudanese, had already been carried out, for he knew how the Oriental is discouraged by the slightest setback, and everything in this enterprise depended on an enduring and steady morale. His railway battalion of eight hundred men, which seemed to be made up of specimens of every tribe in North-East Africa, fellaheen and captive dervishes, Dinkas and Shilluks, learned sleeper and plate laying as they worked, and as the first miles grew along a line which Kitchener the officer had ruled straight through the map of the desert, a number of black youths were sitting under two palms in Wadi Halfa learning morse, soon to become telegraphists.

At first the railway advanced into the void. But soon it was inspiring its own plan and execution, and drawing strength for the future from its own beginnings, like every scheme which grows out of thought into reality. Once the first lines were laid, they could carry up provisions for the three thousand men, then more rails, more sleepers, above all, more water. And both money and time were short. The railway had to be finished before the winter, and at any moment Bedouins, in the service of the Khalifa, might appear in the desert and wipe out the handful of white and black enemies, who never had more than three days' water supply with them. The dervishes had once before destroyed the line which Ismail had laid along the Nile in 1884 as far as the third cataract.

Kitchener had sent a detachment up-Nile from Wadi Halfa to secure that part of the river while he himself endeavoured to reach the same river with the greatest possible speed, moving south-east from the great loop at Abu Hamed, three hundred

miles, the most difficult, most desert part of the line. Which was the way? Without a map, without telegraph or wireless, with a compass and the stars, these navigators of the desert steered their way through sand and rock, never sure whether the goal of their work was not occupied by the enemy, the engineers always five miles ahead, followed by fifteen hundred road-makers, then a thousand railway-builders. Every four days, the advance guard, both in the technical and strategic sense, advanced about six miles, still with coal from Liverpool, still with water from Wadi Halfa, which the first puffing train carried up behind them, like an anxious mother running after her boy with his breakfast. On some days, the railway advanced as much as three miles.

And round about the dervish spies, sure of every hill, every oasis, every camel, passed the word on to Khartoum—the fire-spitting dragon was coming nearer and nearer. They might well destroy it from the Nile side. They began to call it the steamer on wheels. A sandstorm came to their help: twelve miles of railway were destroyed in half an hour. Yet the white men's approach was irresistible, whether they were coming through the cataract on boats or hurrying on camels ahead of the railway through the desert. Who would get there first? And if the Khalifa's troops in Abu Hamed were to defeat those journeying up the Nile what would become of the fiery dragon? But the Englishmen on the Nile took the place, and soon their brothers, the outriders, arrived through the desert and greeted them, like tunnellers meeting from two sides at the appointed place. Allah is great! There was the Nile, there was water, and now they could help the advancing railway-builders from the Nile and prepare the next stretch, southwards to the mouth of the Atbara.

Autumn passed and March came before Kitchener arrived in Berber. He was regarded as a wizard and his construction

inspired far more fear than his men. That was perhaps decisive. The magic powers of the dragon produced their effect, like destiny, by their enigmatic movements, and the Soudanese in Berber dragged along their sick to the engine to touch it. The day before they had been healed by touching the robe that the Khalifa wore, to-day by touching the dragon which came to destroy the Khalifa.

Meanwhile the Atbara had risen with the silt and the flood of the Abyssinian Alps, yet it had to be quickly bridged. The American firm, which delivered the cheapest bridge, completed its thousand-foot span in forty-two days. American mechanics and African labourers cast the bridge on which England was to place her conquering foot below the confluence of the two Niles.

When, on the morning of September 2, 1898, there at Omdurman on the left bank of the White Nile, eight thousand English and eighteen thousand Egyptians threw themselves with their modern weapons on the gigantic army of the dervishes, the last romantic battle of history took place: there were cavalry charges and sword attacks, and death in duels, and the courage of the individual carried the day. There were heroes there, and scenes from battle pictures. That day was more like the battles of Frederick the Great, a century and a half before, than the battles of the Great War, which were to come only fifteen years later: its picture has been drawn by the master hand of Churchill.

Atonement, which men of all times and all colours demand, the atonement for the murdered Gordon, had been exacted. But what impressed posterity then as now was not that the whites had conquered here, and settled in this foreign country, but that its leader and dictator, with all his screaming promises, had brought his fellow-countrymen nothing but evil. Of eight million Soudanese, the wars and pestilences of

those years had made two million: that was the balance of Mahdism. Why had those millions perished? Had their life—the question arises when a people has passed through such great adventures—been enriched by hope, intensified by pride? Had these six millions had a shorter, but perhaps greater life, and been raised from the tedium of their existence by the new ideals of their race? In a duel like this does the mass really gain? A single adventurer has multiplied his self-assurance, a few thousand favoured ones have helped him and themselves at the same time, but the others about have been victimized and disappointed, and the atonement which was exacted from the outside did not help those who had been led astray by the dictator, for they had long since fallen in struggles which did no good either to their souls or to their country.

But it was not only the repeating rifle and up-to-date guns which had drawn the railway into the heart of Africa: it was not only the discipline, courage, and experience of the British commander which won the day here: fifteen years had passed, in which the fires of faith had died down in the others, that faith which, irresistible as the bush-fires, had fired the country. It had died out; two or three times in the next few years, little Mahdis arose in vain. And after this dictatorship, as generally happens, those who had been coerced for their own happiness were glad when it was all over. Many tribes went over to the whites quickly, of their own free will and in friendship, and the Khalifa, who remained in hiding in distant provinces for a year when the English had at last surrounded him, sat down with his faithful followers on a great rug, looked his fate in the face, like a true Musulman, and let himself be shot sitting among his men with dignity, without resistance and without a prayer. That was close to the island in the Nile from which the Mahdi had come.

As regards the Mahdi's remains, Kitchener took strong action, completely destroyed the tomb, so that there should be no pilgrimages, burnt the corpse and strewed the ashes in the Nile. Immediately after the victory, he and his troops, just like the victorious Mahdi fifteen years before, had rowed straight across the White and Blue Niles to the place where the ruins of the palace stood. Yet not one, but two flags, the English and the Egyptian, were raised above the troops in the square, the two national anthems rang out, then Gordon's favourite hymn, *Abide with Me*. One account states that at the sound of it, the iron Kitchener could not conceal his emotion.

XII

While in this way one white power was playing the avenger so as to get the land of the blacks into its hands, a second, its great antithesis, had set out to arrive there first if possible. A desperate race began.

For twenty years past, France, backed up by Bismarck, who wanted to distract her from Sedan, had been busy building up a colonial empire in Africa, yet at all points she had found herself checked by English claims. Even in Egypt, where France had enjoyed a supremacy hardly interrupted since the time of Napoleon, she had been ousted by England, and interminable legal disputes as to the use of loans had increased the tension. But when the Soudan became what statesmen call *res nullius*, without adding *albi*, France required a base on the Nile, and, from her Congo possessions, had sent advance guards into the upper Ghazal region. When in 1895, this had been declared an unfriendly act in London, France could risk no decision, and when she finally offered her help in

Kitchener's expedition, her rival politely declined. In such French minds as then thought in continents, there was growing anxiety lest she should arrive too late at the partition of the world, like the poet in the song. Then a few men devised a fantastic scheme.

What about beginning a race to the Nile! If England was advancing from the north to the Middle Nile, France would have to advance from the west to the Upper Nile: the higher up she seized the mysterious river, the greater power she would have. If France was sitting, say on 10° N., by dominating the White Nile from above, she could worry England, and even, by means of dams, dry her out, as England could not live on 15° with the Blue Nile alone, nor could she keep Egypt alive. In the midst of savage tribes, invincible swamps, bush, deserts, and lagoons, a decision of world-wide import lay hidden. France resolved to try this decision.

And yet she had lost the race on the Nile before she began it, for the victor here was not the one to arrive first and hoist the flag, as in a match, but the one to arrive in better condition, and powerful enough to stay. Could the French build a railway from the Congo to the Nile? With the exception of two or three explorers, had ever a human being marched through these regions? Was there even anything known about the peoples who had to be marched through? A colonel, a handful of natives without guns, was all that France despatched to reach the Nile from the heart of the jungle, by unknown ways, more quickly and higher up than England, who was building a railway from a secure base so as to drive her own and the Egyptian army against the enemy, who, for all she knew, might have subjected the natives up at Fashoda.

"Colonel Marchand," so his minister describes him, "was supple as a rapier blade, with eyes like darts: he spoke tersely,

everything in him was charged with electricity from the soles of his feet to the tips of his hair." He had not held out long as a subordinate clerk in a lawyer's office, preferred to serve as a private soldier in French Africa, became an officer, and now, at the age of thirty-three, set out to give the lie to the old superstition that France must always have bad luck on the Nile. He had to do this in a race against England, with twenty-three white men and five hundred Senegalese, without the full protection of his country, which, to provide for all eventualities, pretended to be merely financing an exploring expedition, so as to preserve good relations with Turkey in case of failure, although nothing of Turkish power could be felt as high as the tenth parallel. Here indeed a knight sallied forth, to carry through a bold enterprise against all the ill-will of destiny. Marchand—he should have been called Chevalier—was a son of Briand de Bois Guilbert, though a thousand years late.

Adventurous as those Norman heroes, their romantic descendant advanced eastward from Loango through the jungles of the Congo basin. Like the knight of the epic, he fought with cannibals and savage beasts, who ate his soldiers and porters in turn. He knew very well that England was arming, building, advancing on the Middle Nile, but how far his rival was on his way to the same river, whether desert and sandstorms were destroying his men as wild men and lions were destroying his own, whether the army of the dervishes was fighting in the north and hence—with the help of Allah!—leaving Marchand's road open in the south—of all this he knew nothing for weeks and months, and when news blew across his path, it was vague. All that urged him on was the will to arrive before the dervishes were annihilated by the English. What the Frenchman dreaded was less the wild brown Mohammedan enemy of civilization than the

civilized, white, Christian Englishman, for he had guns, Egypt, and his prestige.

And the way of the French knight dragged on, longer and longer. Why must the accursed Ghazal stand so low that year that the march was held up for six months? Everything seemed to be conspiring against the warrior, and yet he pressed on, unbroken, his men diminishing steadily. At last, in July 1898, he saw before him the river of his dreams. In Fashoda, a focal point, Marchand hoisted the tricolour with ceremony. France really stood on the Nile. He had been marching for three years. Where was the rival who was to outwave him with the Union Jack? Nothing but rumours, which, all the same, distort and veil everything in Africa like the mirage. The Frenchman sitting in 10° N., on the Nile bank, did not know that down on 18° N., at Berber, on the Nile, the Englishman had already won his first victory over the dervishes. The Englishman did not know that on the same stream, six hundred miles away, a white ally against the blacks was sitting, who was also his enemy.

It is true that what strength the dervishes possessed up there was so small that they fled before Marchand, who was hardly armed: he was able to set up a kind of "fort" on the river, conclude a treaty for the "protection" of the king of the Shilluks, and at the same time plant a few vegetables. But the reinforcements, munitions, communications with home on which everything depended, were lacking. In vain he sought to get into touch with the French Congo in the west, with Abyssinia in the east: everything echoed into the void, he remained alone. Now he sat on the Nile with his last white officers, with a few rifles and a flag which, in summer months, drooped pitifully about its flagstaff.

Meanwhile, invisible to the romantic Frenchman, the steely Englishman was advancing inexorably on his steel rails, driving

the enemy before him, perhaps down to the neighbourhood of Fashoda. Who could know what was happening in this land of anarchy? Only the Nile could connect the two officers, but the Mohammedan enemy was still standing between the Christian rivals. Kitchener had nothing to fear. What he knew was enough—twenty-three white men and five hundred Senegalese had marched off three years before. Even though they were all alive, and all sitting up there on the Nile, they could not make an enemy.

Four days after the capture of Khartoum, a steamer brought the first news from up-river: a white man was in Fashoda and had made peace with the Shilluks. It was five days after the decisive victory at Omdurman, and this Englishman, who had already been on his feet for two years in the country, might well have rested on his laurels for a few days. Yet he realized what was at stake, sent the steamer back at once, and himself set off three days later, up-Nile, to visit the fateful Frenchman. For all eventualities, he took with him a few hundred Soudanese troops, a hundred Scottish Highlanders, and a few gunboats to give his guest on the Upper Nile an impressive greeting.

Nine days later, the English steamers stopped at the Fashoda station, where a huge tricolour was hanging on a high flag-staff. It was a Gilbertian meeting: two white officers, both in khaki, but with different badges, belonging to two neighbour empires living at peace with each other far away, met surrounded by a thousand naked negroes at the end of the world, each with orders to drive the other to the other end of the world. With all due admiration for Kitchener's pluck, at this moment all one's sympathy leaps out to Marchand, who, without a railway, without troops, without any instructions from the capital such as Kitchener got by wire from Khartoum, here met the victor of the day before, armed

with nothing but a revolver he might not use and a flag which would not wave.

A conversation between the two conquerors followed in Marchand's hut. First the Englishman congratulated the Frenchman on having come through, the Frenchman congratulated the Englishman, for in the last few days the great victory of the white man over the dervishes had found its way on negro lips to his rival. We know nothing of how long the pause lasted after the congratulations. We only know that Marchand declared firmly: "I have been instructed by my government to occupy the Ghazal as far as its junction with the Jebel, as well as all the Shilluk land on the left of the Nile."

"I have been instructed," said Kitchener, "to recognize no white power on the Nile and must object," whereupon he handed Marchand a document, for now he had to hoist his flag beside the French one. But then the gentleman came out—he felt with the feelings of his comrade, would not force him to lower his flag, for that might have led to trouble, retired five hundred yards and hoisted—the Turkish flag. Then he sailed up-Nile for a day, established a post on the Sobat, returned, left behind him a garrison of Soudanese troops and four guns, and declared to the Frenchman, with the same courtesy, that "the country" was now under the protection of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium: all transport of munitions on the Nile was prohibited. And now the two officers faced each other, not sitting, but standing.

"I have to take orders from my government only," replied the Frenchman.

"And if I were forced . . ." asked Kitchener, but he does not seem to have finished the sentence.

"Then I shall die here."

Everything proceeded according to the ancient rites of

military honour. According to time-honoured custom, the comedy ended in Europe. These two soldiers, whose meeting was reported by Kitchener, were mere puppets in the hands of politicians and speculators; Paris and London threw themselves noisily on the problem, and actually brought the two countries to the verge of a war which was prevented not by England's wisdom, but above all by France's weakness: newspaper orgies of greed and hate accompanied the six weeks' negotiations between the cabinets, till Paris had to give way and celebrate Colonel Marchand as the "emissary of civilization," in order to cover with painful laurels the retreat of the knight and the defeat of France.

Kitchener later declared that, by his victory over the dervishes, he had saved Marchand from being murdered by them. In any case, the English Government at the same time won a bloodless victory over the French. France realized in these weeks how powerless she was without England, and completely changed her policy under this impression. She resolved to go with England.

Colonel Marchand, however, abandoned by his superiors, and degraded into a mere explorer, at first thought of disobeying the order to leave: he declared that he lacked munitions and provisions. When the Englishman put all he needed, and his steamer too, at his disposal, Marchand rejected this easy way home. On his luckier rival's steamer? Even on his new railway, and in the end with false laurels to France? Another Nile explorer refusing to be saved, not far from the spot where Emin, twenty years before, had refused to be saved by Stanley. Marchand decided to make his way through to Abyssinia, and in this way crossed Africa.

A Don Quixote *malgré lui*, a tragic figure, who found the world comic, the man who planted the tricolour on the Nile only to have to roll it up again after five months of useless

waiting, had, like his medieval forebears, resolved at the end of the adventure to save his honour, if not the honour of France, for if France, he felt, had let herself be shamefully defeated, there was still his private honour, the honour of the lawyer's clerk and private soldier, now the colonel and unhappy conqueror, Jean Baptiste Marchand of Thoisse.

Six years after his return, he saw the indirect consequences of his Nile expedition, the Anglo-French Entente, later fought side by side with the English in the Great War, then saw the new coolness between the two countries. Before he died in 1933, Marchand saw the African empire that France had built up for herself in the west.

But the Nile valley was no part of it.

XIII

The flag that Kitchener had hoisted in Fashoda was red—it was the Turkish flag. To-day the beautiful green Egyptian flag floats beside the Union Jack on all ships and public buildings: the condominium has lasted a generation, and may last for a long time yet, for it is only contested by the weaker partner.

Even this turn in the fate of the Soudan was determined by the Nile. England found a welcome pretext for occupying the Soudan in guarding the river for Egypt and regulating its upper course—the reason was even a real one, for at that time she practically owned Egypt. She had redeemed the country from bankruptcy in order to make herself mistress at one point whose importance seemed, so to speak, eternal. And now, ruling the source and the mouth of the Nile, was England going to abandon to a third power its middle course, the dramatic junction of the two Niles? And to whom? To the

Soudanese, who had proved themselves savages under the Mahdi? To the Egyptians, who had ruined the Soudan in sixty years? Or perhaps to the French? If anyone was to annoy Egypt from the Soudan by means of the Nile water, it could only be England.

Even the Egyptians, who, in their weakness, could neither reconquer nor rule the Soudan, must prefer England as the ruling power in the Soudan to the Soudanese or the French, for England had too great interests in Lower Egypt to ruin it by a quarrel. Even if England had hoisted only her own flag after her victory in Khartoum, Egypt was then powerless against her; but Egypt had secret allies, with whose money and influence England had to reckon in Cairo. The war with France, which threatened in the weeks of Fashoda, was avoided not only by France's weakness, but by the English decision to raise the Turkish flag which Kitchener had hoisted as a symbol on the old bastion on 10° N.; the idea of the two flags and of the prevention of war seem to have interacted. Like all orientals, the Egyptians took advantage of the quarrel between the western powers: though they had lost the Soudan by their maladministration, they were now to be joint rulers of a country which they had won back, it is true, with their own soldiers at their own cost, yet only under English leadership, and could only hold with English prestige.

Lord Cromer found the solution of the two flags which he himself called "a hybrid form of government whose fate its authors would not bewail if it should yield to a firmer one." If this hybrid form has stood the test, to the astonishment of the world, that is due to the unequal partition of all rights. If this condominium is a marriage, then it is an oriental one, into which the wife brings her belongings and later her children without acquiring any rights save the right to live—that is, the water of the Nile: she is certainly the legitimate,

chief wife, who, adorned with jewels, yet deeply veiled, rides through a triumphal arch on great occasions by the side of her mighty husband. The Soudan was the first mandatory power in history, founded twenty years before the term, with its false ring, was coined at the Paris Conference of 1919.

From the Governor-General downwards, all the high officials in the Anglo-Egyptian Soudan are Englishmen, and if the King in Cairo had ever refused to appoint the Governor recommended by the British Government, he would simply have found himself up against the British world empire. This Governor, whom the King cannot recall on his own account, still has rights such as the Mahdi had, for the Soudanese still stands under military law, and the Governor commands and executes justice in all important matters with dictatorial power. In the beginning, the Egyptian was allowed to provide troops, and, with a contribution of three-quarters of a million, may now bear the major share of the costs.

And yet Egypt profits by it. If she had lost the Middle Nile to England by war, she could, by the morality of history, plan revenge: in actual fact, by England's intervention, she returned to the joint ownership of a country she had lost to its original Nubian inhabitants by misrule.

The Egyptians feel as superior to those inhabitants as any white mandatory power to its negroes. The Egyptian upper classes, the non-fellahs, who are as small in number as the upper classes of Czarist Russia, look down on the Soudanese as the heirs of a five-thousand-year-old culture look down on cannibals, and classify them in tribes according to their aptitude for serving as grooms, cooks, and footmen in their fine houses in Cairo. At the time of the reconquest, about 1900, the Soudanese servant was nothing but the son of his enslaved father, who, in his turn, had been used in slave hunts as a kind of hawk to swoop down on the encircled victim.

To-day, he can return home at the end of a few years, bringing with him the money, ideas, and pride of the quarter-civilized.

This feeling of superiority, the role of master which the Egyptian assumes before the Soudanese, has increased the latter's rancour in the course of the last generation. In the Egyptian, he does not fear his owner: he hates the pasha whom the Mahdi drove out of his country, the Turco, who could only be carried back into the country on the shoulders of the white giant, and who to-day employs a few thousand of his young men to clean his shoes and his car. What do these lords matter to him—the foreign ones or his own? Should the Soudanese not rather compare himself with the fellah, who, with the same ox, on the same river, turns the same water-wheel, whose wives grind the same dhurra on the same rough stones with their strong hands, and whose children climb the same palms for dates? Does the Egyptian fellah know one hieroglyph of that ancient wisdom which stood on the fibres of his papyrus, or one syllable more than the young Soudanese who is just learning to read?

Once more we become aware of the moral cycle between white power and black education, that cycle which must lead to the impotence of the whites. England has not ruled here with the rhinoceros whip, nor did she make her first appearance with a code of law and a tape-measure, but upheld from the outset her co-operation with the customs of the tribes, left the lowest courts in native hands, and to-day fills 55 per cent of the lower administrative posts with Soudanese and only 23 per cent with Egyptians, so that there are now in the Soudan twelve hundred native customs and treasury clerks, post office clerks, and teachers. Altogether, three thousand Soudanese employees, among them judges, printers, engineers, mayors, railwaymen, doctors, have been trained from the alphabet

upwards, witnesses of English civilization, and at the same time the first, not yet menacing but rapidly increasing pioneers of a people that must, by the training given to it by its masters, develop into those masters' rivals.

This rise of the Soudan will have changed the fate of Egypt and even of Abyssinia by the end of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth, the Egyptian conqueror could give the Soudanese nothing, and hence could not impress him: the northern half of the huge country had, too, the same faith as he, and this faith, which binds the individual more closely to God, fate, and the morality of the state than that of a Christian on the same level, had long given him a justifiable pride in his dealings with the white man. His thoughts have been thus expressed by one of those who know him best:[†] "These odd white men obviously mean well, but they have but a mean conception of religion, and many of their habits are wanting in good taste."

The people of the Soudan, enslaved, sold, oppressed, then, in savage revolt, tricked by its leaders, and trampled underfoot, to be conquered in the end by white soldiers, has suddenly been lifted out of its gloom into the brightness of the western century, and of all centuries, the present one. The son of a Soudanese who, with his family, as a troop with a number, was led through the zoos of Europe, fenced in like the wild animals of his country, to perform the dances and hunts of his distant people for the amusement of white spectators, now sits at the microscope of the research institute in Khartoum, or counts in retorts the microbes in the Nile water.

Certainly, the twelve thousand Soudanese who can read form but a fragment of those six millions which the population has again reached, but the knowledge possessed by

[†] Harold MacMichael.

these few spreads to-day more rapidly than the knowledge of those medieval monks who were, too, superior to their fellow-citizens in equally small numbers, and with knowledge realization spreads. Why should they regard the fellah of Egypt as their master? His progress was just as slow as their own. Does Cairo possess a school for the sons of peasants as brilliant and beautiful as the Gordon College? There, beside the palace on the Blue Nile, five hundred pupils in white shirts file two by two in solemn procession through the splendid gardens, like the knights in Parsifal. Training colleges for the army, post office, and medicine, in all about fifteen hundred schools for thirty thousand pupils, have been given them by the white men. As the rapidly increasing Egyptian population is outgrowing the food and resources of the Nile valley, so that, by 1950 all the land will be under cultivation, the superfluous Egyptians will migrate up-Nile to the good fields in the Soudan, their depot and branch establishment, which will not be as underpopulated as they are to-day. Did they not do exactly the same after the expulsion of the Ethiopian kings?

All this, combined with the national feeling in which the coloured peoples are beginning to imitate the bad example of the white, points to future struggles which the medium of the English is attempting to mitigate. "For two or three generations," said Lord Lugard, the last great Afrikander, "we can show the negro what we are: then we shall be asked to go away. Then we shall have to leave the land to those it belongs to, with the feeling that they have better business friends in us than in other white men." And Maréchal Lyautey even said, "*La seule excuse pour la colonization, c'est le médecin.*" This is the mature wisdom of two pioneers of the conquest.

England's great achievements in the Soudan were facilitated



[Egyptian Government photo]

JOURNEY OVER THE STEPPE



[Lehner & Landrock]

THE SECOND CATARACT

by world history. Even the railway, at the beginning, which reduced the loop of the Nile from its six-hundred-mile sweep to a straight line of little more than two hundred, was not merely a decisive factor in the war: to-day it carries the visitor from Cairo to Khartoum in a hundred hours. The aeroplane takes fourteen. Goods, on a second line, take only twenty-seven hours from the Atbara to the Red Sea: Port Soudan, established on the site of the useless old port, ships three million tons of exports yearly to a value of £5,000,000. The way from the Red Sea to the heart of Africa, which the peoples of antiquity sought, is now open, the Upper Nile is served by weekly steamers. Wells on the old caravan routes, oil tanks for the new flying service, the distribution of corn in famine years, more rubber than before, and hence more of the sweets they love, more salt, obtained by evaporation from the Red Sea, the doctor, the friend of man, and above all, a resolute protection against slavery, which only survives on the long, unguardable frontier of Abyssinia, all these things cannot merely be regarded as the achievement of the century: they must in part be the achievement of the ruling power in the Soudan: that is proved by a comparison with other colonies. Even the crows profit by English civilization: they pick up in Khartoum the glittering capsules of the mineral water bottles, carry them off to the paved terrace, turn them about and make patterns with them.

The best constructive work in the Soudan was largely done by officers, a proof that there are even men in uniform who have learnt something more than slaughter. The World War had enriched this secluded country; the decline of Turkey, the creation of the new monarchy in Cairo had in actual fact strengthened England's hand: a few riots, led by former Gordon boys, disturbed British rule for a few days only, there were mutinies among black troops under English officers

which made serious-minded Englishmen realize the dangers of education. The question was what to do with the dangerous Egyptian elements in the army which were behind the rising, as they had been there since the condominium was founded. The murder of a missionary did not provide sufficient pretext for severe measures.

In November 1924, the British Governor-General of the Soudan, on a visit to Cairo, was assassinated by Egyptian nationalists. A second Gordon! This time, England could act more promptly. Instead of fifteen years, it took only three days to produce an ultimatum which, besides fines and other punishments, demanded the expulsion of all Egyptian troops and officers. It was not only those nationalists who had set the Nile on their white flag as the goal of their policy who trembled then: every moderate Egyptian had to realize that the power on the Upper Nile was menacing.

With the Egyptian troops, the last vestige of Egyptian power vanished from the Soudan. To-day, only the green flag floats beside the red, white, and blue from the roof of the Khartoum Palace, and from the roof of the steamers ploughing their way through the Nile.

XIV

As far as Khartoum, the Nile was a piece of pure nature. For miles on end, only the stakes driven into the embankments showed, by their running numbers, that man was watching over it, and where villages brought life to its banks, they spoke only of to-day and yesterday. But now, on the second half of its course, columns and temples, hewn stones and pyramids irregularly scattered fringe the river, milestones of history which the hand of man has raised through five

thousand years as a memorial of his deeds, and always along the great river which, below Khartoum, flows through the desert in a very narrow oasis, twelve hundred miles long. As not only the perdurable granite, but the lighter sandstone too suffered neither from rain nor thunderstorms, but only from occasional sandstorms, they would still be standing here as they have always stood if man, fighting with man, had not done the work of the elements.

Here, in Khartoum, where the brother pair, for ever united, quits the only town which has yet risen on the Nile, to see no other on its banks for months, nothing seems to rise so high as the gracefully curved masts of the great sailing-boats, for the domes of the native town on the White Nile, between which the white walls fade away into the desert, look as low as the towers of the English on the eastern, Blue Nile. There is nothing here to recall the aspect, or even the outline, of our old towns rising so proudly from the Seine, the Danube, the Thames, and the Moskwa. Here the double river reigns in such majesty that it would out roar the life of a million on its four banks.

On the right bank of the Blue Nile, continuing along that of the united river, the magnificent island of Tuti rises, sloping upwards, on which the silt lavishes greater wealth than on most stretches on its course. Nowhere are the palms richer than here, nowhere does the dark green flaunt in richer shades from out the yellow of the plain, and from the spreading branches of the sycamores on the banks delightful coolness flows. Under dreamlike, heavy-shadowing trees, the so-called haraz trees, the island stretches over a mile downstream to its high, wooded point.

Smaller islands, which rise near it from the junction of the two Niles, disappear in the weeks of high water, and when they rise again owing to the deposit of sand and stones, near

by, but not quite on the same spot, squabbles set in among the inhabitants.

"That was my island," shrieks Achmet.

"It isn't. I dug it last winter," Mohamed screams back, and the judge is hard put to it, for the ordnance survey lies buried in the Nile, like Prospero's book of magic at the end of all his wanderings.

In heavy-laden boats men and goods are carried from one of the four river-banks to the other. As they glide across penned in under the great sail, they look, in their white shirts, like groups from Tartarus, and memory goes back to those times, hardly past, when these boats, filled with slaves, were really wafted towards the underworld by the wind. The great Nile barques, which from this point to the mouth more often cross than mount or descend the river, simple barges with a cooking stove built of clay at the prow, can only be steered from the high poop by one who knows the winds and the reefs, and the oars, which protect them from the rocks by means of two great outriggers, can only be manipulated by the hands of experts. But above, on the two curved masts, the great lateen sails swell, and to the rider coming from the desert, and not seeing the deep Nile valley from the distance, they look like giant birds flying slowly over the desert, close to the ground, solemn and unreal.

But now, though the Blue Nile, in its reckless haste, forces the White against its western bank, it can only do so for a stretch, then the steady strength of the elder brother regains its appointed space, and only when the Abyssinian rains create the great flood can the Blue dominate the current. In this war of the elements, there are little profiteers: the fish of the Blue Nile, startled by the immense swelling of the current, take refuge in a quiet, silent pool by the bank, all unknowing that the pelicans of the White Nile await them

there to kill them. Thus the lackeys of great rivals scuffle and cheat each other long after their masters are reconciled.

Here in Khartoum, where the brothers embrace, the stream confirms in its appearance the saga-like glory of its name: only here and in Cairo does the Nile appear a king. That, after all the adventures of its youth, it became a king, that at the end, after the stony weeks of its passage through the desert, which are now only beginning, it still remains one—there its secret, inner power is revealed.

Yet just as great characters, in the midst of their struggles with the world, fret in inward discord, the Nile too, where it takes up the struggle with the desert, is caught in its own whirlpools, for now the epoch of the cataracts begins. Like the swamps above, they too are set there by nature as enemies, as tests of courage and strength, and bring its character face to face with momentous problems.

The short stretch which the Nile still has to flow through the bush below Khartoum, to the mouth of the Atbara, is already something like a farewell to nature, for soon the desert begins only to end close to the sea. Here the babanus, the Soudan ebony, still grows and the mahogany tree: the indigo is so prolific, without being cultivated that it was formerly worked there in a kind of factory, and the acacia is so strong that the Turks set up wharves for building Nile boats. In between there luxuriates a tree with soft, corky wood, whose poisonous sap blinds the woodman if he touches his eyes with it, shunned by all the animals except the goats, which peacefully nibble at it without harm. The acacia has adapted itself to the ebb and flood by striking longer roots so as to live through both water levels. In this region, the water of the Nile is singularly cold, a fact which cannot be explained only by the frequent coolness of the nights.

Two or three days' ride, on fifty-five mules, below Khar-

toum, the river narrows down to seventy-five yards, two basalt columns enclose a gorge, the first cataract begins. Geographers have called it the sixth, because they moved up-river with civilization, and counted from Egypt. We must follow their enumeration, although the milestones of a river, like those of a man's life, should not be counted from the end. The Arabs, who count thirty-one cataracts, since several consist of manifold falls, have not denoted them with cold figures, but with fantastic names: Camel Neck, Coral, The House of the Slave, The Pardoned, The Muddy Ones, The Shakers. At this so-called sixth, the highest of the Nile cataracts, the river begins the great loop, the only one in its whole south-north career, and only close by the end of the cataracts, at the lowest and first, does the loop end, so that the last lies directly vertical to the first: the Shabluka cataract lies on the fourteenth parallel, on the same degree of longitude as the Assouan cataract on the twenty-fourth.

Here in the desert, where there is no sign of living nature to check the river's flow, the antediluvian world, in granite form, has thrown itself across the path of the Nile and forces on the river the whole enormous detour of seven hundred and fifty miles. And yet it is just this new struggle from which the heroic stream draws the fresh daring and the fullness of life without which it would run dry between the two deserts. In its thirty-one cataracts, it is again put to the test, as it was above in the swamps, and again it stands the test.

All the rocky hills which squeeze round the Nile on this long stretch are of granite, gneiss, and argillite, that is, of primitive rock. They prevent navigation, for if men had succeeded in laying canals through the swamps, they would have had to sacrifice millions on this equally long stretch to overcome the granite, and at the end would only have mastered the long arc of a waterway the chord of which is already

crossed by Kitchener's desert railway. Even to-day, the Nile is only navigable on three reaches, for one hundred and fifty miles on its upper course, then for twelve hundred from Rejaf to Khartoum, and finally for six hundred on its lower course from Assouan to the mouth. Even leaving the Blue Nile out of account, which is only navigable on its last four hundred miles, nearly half the giant stream is unnavigable, even though boats use short stretches between the cataracts. It is the fate of all the four great rivers of Africa, and a consequence of its formation in plateaux, that none has become a great highway of traffic like the rivers of the other continents.

Here, twelve hundred and fifty miles below the pyramid of Rejaf, where the rock again rises, crowding in and cramping the river, the phenomenon of the hundred islands appears, to reappear in every cataract. For more than ten miles, dissolved into rapids, large and small, the Nile, in the midst of the precipitous fall of rock, creates the world of green islands which, refreshed by the eternal spray of the rushing waters, offers to the naked grey rock, the parched yellow plain, the contrast of its green paradise of growth, shaded by broad, feathery acacias, huge sycamores, stiff doum palms, all interwoven with lianas as in the jungle, and compensated with eternal green for the solitude in whose eternal spell they live, visited by no men and few beasts, in the midst of the hurrying waters. Thus, in a flower-filled garden, secluded women stand, unenviously watching the eternal travellers of life pass by on their way.

But while the rock forces the Nile to quit its appointed south-north course and turn east, it is not only the way of the river that is determined by its stratification: the angle at which it falls determines the fate of the small strip along the banks. In these narrow, fertile parts between the deserts,

fifteen feet of mud-covered land between plain and river can suffice to feed a village which erects its clay huts on hard eminences, so as to save every inch of the fertile strip for corn and a few palms.

Shendi lies on the edge of the plain and enjoys broader stretches of cultivated land on the flat eastern bank. Here the Nile enters the desert which it only quits at Cairo. At this point, the Nile receives the last tidings from the east, like a king the last couriers from home before beginning his great campaign: here, two hundred miles below Khartoum, at the most easterly point of its whole course, it receives its last tributary, the Atbara, which rises in the same volcanoes of Abyssinia from which the Blue Nile comes.

Crossing the Atbara in June on the great desert railway bridge—it is the fourth bridge across the Nile since the source—it is impossible to understand what it cost Kitchener to bore the piles for six great arches deep into the rock, for a waterless river-bed yawns below. But returning in July, a river five hundred yards wide roars with such violence round these piles that its muddy waters are hurled far over its mouth on the western bank of the Nile, and it is easy to understand why the Arabs call it the Black River. As mad as the Blue Nile, its bigger brother, fed by the same rains it carries down bamboos and tree-trunks, boulders and roots, parts of dead buffaloes, even of elephants, with its rushing waves, victims from a heedlessly vegetating world of animals and trees that it has surprised, seized, and killed, as a great revolutionary the placid burgher.

This is the last tributary of the Nile. The desert has come; from now on, it is alone to the end with its ancient waters.

On its journey through the great loop, the valley of the Nile is of three colours: the deep yellow of the desert on both sides, spreading into infinity, the deep green of the

cultivated strips, sometimes a mile or two broad, generally narrow, at times not more than a hundred paces deep, and in between, the shiny grey of the wet granite which rises above the foaming river in the form of a thousand islands and rocks, forming the rapids. The sudden transition from the yellow desert sand to the green strip along the banks, the luxuriance of that strip, and the absence of half-desert zones, shows that what is here is no field, such as Allah blesses with more rain or less, but a garden, which the hands of men created in defiance of the desert by carrying the gift brought down by the river in its stony bed to the desert's edge.

The magician who accomplishes it all, and who, later, will create those cultivated strips in Egypt when the brief flood has passed, is the sakia: thousands of water-wheels accompany the river with their whining and creaking, thousands of oxen turn the water-wheels in their ten-hour, dull round, each pair driven by a man or boy generally sitting on the axle, to be turned with it. These oxen are the remote descendants of animals, the boys the remote descendants of men who through the ages have drawn up the water of the Nile at the same place with the same wheels and buckets, and the palms that yield the wood are the remote descendants of those palms which Egyptians and Romans, heathens, Mohammedans, and Christians planted along the same flat bank, cut in exactly the same way, and fitted with ropes and cogs to renew the circulation of water and fertility on the fringe of the desert.

In the thundering desert sunshine, the water-wheel wails its melody along the Nile valley, a thousand miles northward, and just as Hephaistos, the ugliest of the gods, puffing and sweating, made emerald jewels out of the secret treasures of the mountains, the old gnarled water-wheel, groaning and creaking, turns the fringe of the desert into emerald green land.

On some such slope of the Nile bank, a vertical wheel of

thick hempen rope turns close to the bank, though touching the water, with a chain of twenty or more longish, red earthenware pitchers. It moves round a palm log, which is set horizontally in the hub. Below, each pitcher sinks into the Nile and is filled to the brim: above, when it has passed the highest point of the wheel's circle, it empties its water into a trough of hollowed tree-trunk which conveys it to a shallow ditch. The horizontal palm-trunk in the wheel is attached a few yards higher up to a solid wooden wheel, which is turned round a vertical shaft by the pair of oxen. The boy driving them sits behind them on a wooden board, and twice in every turn ducks his head under a third, supporting palm-trunk, or, with the ropes in his hands, he walks behind the oxen, and then need not bend so low under the obstacle.

But when the driving-wheel moves, the vertical palm trunk turns in a wooden hub below, therefore it scrapes and squeaks continually. Therefore the water-wheels mourn through all Nubia and all Egypt, always along the Nile. For the poor man cannot cement stakes into the earth: he has no chalk and no nails to spare: everything is carved out of wood: the trunks, the hemp, the very dried palm-leaves which he sets up all round to protect him from the sun, all comes from the palm, but the wood for the wheels is often acacia-wood. All he has to buy are the pitchers, but his fathers did so before him, and when one breaks, nowadays he can certainly find in the towns an empty petrol can or preserved food tin.

These tins, flashing in the sunshine, are the only innovations the water-wheel has undergone since the time of the Pharaohs. On the frescoes of the royal tombs, it turns just as it turns to-day, and when two, three, four flat wheels turn above each other on the sloping bank, each turned by a pair of oxen, the water of the Nile, within a few minutes, reaches

a zone which lies thirty to sixty feet above it, rainless, void, awaiting the hand of man to receive the water and forthwith to grow green.

This is the ancient magic wheel by means of which the men of the Nile valley replaced rain during those eight months when the river itself is not carrying down the rain from the Abyssinian heights, and overflowing all the flat land along its banks. Here in Nubia, and later in Egypt, where the artificial and sudden irrigation forces on all the crops, and where three months, often a few weeks, take the place of the natural cycle from spring to autumn, the plough has lost its meaning, and over wide distances has never been seen. The peasant makes holes with a little iron, or simply with his heel, and throws a few seeds in, knowing no manure save the weeds he has previously uprooted. Swiftly the blade springs up, shooting aloft sometimes to a height of fifteen feet, and the best species yield white, fine-husked corn in big ears. This dhurra is wheat and barley both, but beside it they sow and reap beans and lentils, pumpkins, melons and red pepper, tobacco and castor oil.

Here, in the land of the great cataracts, by Berber and Dongola, the sweetest dates of the whole Nile valley ripen and are multiplied in a peculiar way. As there are too few male palms, their precious faculties must be distributed as in a matriarchal state. In spring, the boys clamber up the male tree, pluck twigs with flowers, and with them fertilize the female trees, which they water with the water wheel below. And when the hot wind blows, they give thanks to God, for the Arab proverb says: "The dates of Allah grow with their feet in the water and their heads in fire,"

Bronze-brown, tall, gaunt creatures, from whom the desert sand and glow have stripped every shred of fat, all muscle and sinew, the Berbers stand under their palms. They inhabit

the Nile valley in the loop and for long distances round about. They settled there thousands of years ago, although they once were nomads, and their brothers are nomads still. Fleshless as they are, they also shave their hair and beards, so that their cavernous eyes, between their receding foreheads and slightly arched noses, seem to be hiding under their bushy eyebrows, and, as the only point of life, dominate their whole appearance: but those eyes are vivacious and friendly, like the character of their owners. When the rich Egyptians send for such Berbers to be their couriers and servants, cooks and coachmen in Cairo, they know well the loyalty of this tribe to its masters and the good nature which makes the Berbers the most hospitable race in East Africa. While they live on maize, cheese, and a handful of dates, often sleeping on a chest, and always cheerful, for a guest they will slaughter a sheep, send long distances for the best milk, even coffee, while at night they watch over his sleep or tell him tales under the stars. In their language, there are traces showing that they were once Christian. Thus these Mohammedans still call Sunday *kirage*, that is *kyriake*, the Lord's Day.

Dark green in the yellow desert, their capital Berber lies close below the mouth of the Atbara: to-day it is small, eighty years ago it was the biggest town on the Upper Nile, because the great sailing-boats came up as far as this point, for immediately above it the cataracts begin. It was the old market for ivory and ebony, for gold, above all for slaves, and the shady gardens of the old officials and merchants actually arose from the sweat and toil of men and beasts.

In this zone, the Nile finds a voice. Here, in the land of the cataracts, in the region of the loop which crosses four degrees of latitude, the Nile begins to rush and storm, and along some stretches to thunder. These granite ridges and bars which, in the primeval times before the Nile burst

through, may have formed great inland seas, and only have yielded after millions of years of the duel between the water and the granite, are polished, big and small, from one year to the next, from one hour to the next, and in the never-ending battle, yield their strength to the victorious water only in the form of tiny particles, of gravel. For the noise of battle cannot but arise when the river, between a thousand islands and rocks, forges its way onward in mile-long rapids. A Roman writer declared that the inhabitants emigrated because they lost their hearing, but the mighty voices of the Berbers prove to us to-day that necessity strengthens any organ, for their call carries over the rushing river from bank to bank, while white men can hardly hear each other at ten paces' distance.

And the ear, in these wild, romantic stretches of the Nile, is surprised in another way when the camel rider approaches the river along some desert track, without seeing in the distance the tops of the palm-trees or the masts of the sailing boats, for then only a remote roar rises to delight him, and he hails it in the desert as the Greeks once hailed the sea. Or again, as he rides along the river in flood-time, he can distinguish amid the roar the perpetual rattling of the little stones which the rising water loosens from the bank.

Forty-five miles below Berber, where the rapids form the fifth cataract, there are seven big and hundreds of little islands which strive in vain to check the river over a distance of more than six miles.

But near the twentieth degree of latitude, two hundred and fifty railway miles below Khartoum, the rock is stronger than the water, and the granite is so far master of the river that it forces its enemy to make a detour which looks like a retreat. The great sheets of basalt running through the desert here from east to west force the Nile—the only time in its whole

career—to turn round and run a few hundred miles back to the south, as though it were trying to regain the beginning of its course. It does so to keep alive, but later, far from the granite enemy, turns almost as suddenly northwards again, in an unguarded moment, and, by a gigantic detour, finds once more its appointed course, like a man, thrown off his bearings, and cast back into them again by magnetic powers.

For this turning-point near Abu Hamed lies almost vertically below Khartoum and above Assouan. Here, at the great elbow, the biggest island in the Nile, twenty miles long and three broad, has been left standing as a witness to the struggle of the elements, while the river, under the pressure of the obstructing granite, narrows and widens again irregularly from two hundred to two thousand yards. On some of these giant islands the ancients sought gold and silver, and Diodorus raved of copper and jewels, but either they have been stolen, or were never there.

There have always been robbers in this region, in which the Nile is the only trade-route between two deserts. When, below the elbow, an old fort rises, gleaming black on a steep rock, against which the river breaks below in fresh rapids, when, narrowed, cramped between shapes of gloom, it drives its swift course through unyielding darkness, when again a poverty-stricken hut clings to the rock wall above, nourishing man, wife, and children on the tiniest of strips, old pictures from the Middle Ages fill the mind's eye, the robber-knight, the imprisoned merchant, and the beggar peasant, and the happiest of all are the poor, as they are in folk-tales, for the peasants of this region assure the traveller that they know no sickness.

Still wilder than the fifth is the fourth cataract, which the river has to encounter in the middle of that south-westerly stretch it has had to take. Here, besides granite and basalt,

porphyry and syenite press upon it, ravaged, wild and gloomy to the view, a hill nearly four miles long thrown right across its path, of formidably crowded black rock, through which the river bites its way. This is the most difficult part of all the Middle Nile, and only the most experienced of the natives can cross it. Upstream, the boats can only be dragged through all the cataracts, but there is so much good fellowship here that one water-wheel calls on the other, and its drivers help to pull to the next. All are first-class swimmers, and when the Nubian of these regions sets out downstream, he blows up his leather water-pipe, or builds a pointed raft of dhurra stalks, takes bread and dates in a melon rind, and then, steering with practised hands, drifts down the Nile for days.

He may be stoned from above on his journey, or kidnapped like the handsome daughters of those Nubians on the banks, when a famous black Paris was carrying on in these parts, and bore off his booty to Kaab el Aabid, "The Square House of the Slave," the remains of which are still to be seen here on the banks of the turbulent river. He was really only a wretched slave who had carried away his master's wife and dragged her to the rocky wilderness, where he built her a keep and only failed to become immortal with his dusky Helen because no Homer was there to sing their story. Only negro lips murmur the legend of this revolutionary and lover of women through the roar of the Nile.

For here, between rocks and island, it has turned wild again, as it was at its source. On these reaches, the hippopotamus and the crocodile again disport themselves, the lord and the robber of the Nile, and lie in wait for the swimmer. When the crocodile has burrowed itself into the sand, and seized a man with its tail, it plays with him like a cat, appalling the brothers of his victim on the bank. The natives here have

fewer weapons and means of defence than the Shilluks higher up. They say, too, that the crocodile prefers the white man to the black, and thus the European, here at least, in the middle of the African desert, commands a respect which is as questionable as his superiority. It is a moot point whether the crocodile really pursues men on land: many explorers deny it, but the Nubians declare that it is true, and tell the victim to run in circles, the most likely way of saving himself.

The hippopotamus, on the other hand, conducts himself like a gentleman, for though at night, on land, he may trample down men and beasts from time to time, he leaves them lying, and only capsizes the boats in the Nile by mistake, because God made him too big and the boats too small. But he would never drag men or animals into the water. As he swims as lightly as the elephant walks—as he is good-natured, lazy, and always pleased in the company of his like, he sometimes makes less noise and raises less waves than might be expected of a little steamer displacing two tons of water. Basking placidly, olive-green, he might be a rock in the river, if his five coy pink patches, eyes, ears, and snout, did not betray an animal presence, or suddenly a monstrous pair of jaws yawn in the middle of the rock, with an exhibition of crooked, broken teeth, slanting inwards, and revealing the history of vegetarian orgies, although at the moment they take only the tenderest flower of the poets, the water-lily, to let it dissolve on their gigantic tongue.

With his rather big eyes, which seem to have been laid on to his face, and not stuck in, like the elephant's, and with his little ears, he is quick to note the presence of his enemies, but as no one can overcome him, he maintains, except in the rutting season, the repose of a clumsy dragon. When water-plants are plentiful, he spends his night too in the water, but as a rule, he goes on land in the evening to feed and then every-

thing takes flight before his deep, bass grunts, which sound as if they were issuing from a cave, for with all his peacefulness it sometimes happens that he inadvertently tramples a pair of oxen to death at a water-wheel, and when he goes home the field behind him might have been turned up with an iron ploughshare.

Then he glides back into the maternal river.

XV

The Nile has flowed far through mountains, swamps, and deserts without seeing a sign of the past on its banks, were it only a broken column.

Suddenly a field of pyramids arises below the fourth cataract, with more than forty stone tombs of men who once were mighty. Others soon follow, eight or nine of them round the foot of a hill visible from far and wide at the southernmost point of the loop. This place of death is called Sanàm Abu-Dôm, which means "the place where statues lie under doumpalms," and now, as the Nile once more turns northwards, statues and pyramids succeed each other at long intervals down to below the second cataract. Down to what shadowy depths of history does the hand of man grope in the desert? What conqueror, with his picture-language hewn in granite, written on papyrus, first preserved the names of savage negro tribes for posterity? Who but those Egyptians, whose greed for gold and slaves urged them up their own river, the oldest race on the Nile and in the Western world!

And yet it was again the Nile which stopped their advance. It set the cataracts across their way, and just as the priest withholds from the worshipper the sight of the holy image, the mysterious river seemed to withhold from the stranger

an insight into the solitude of the water they lived on. Whether they came up on their own boats, or built new ones between the cataracts, we do not know. The desert was waterless, and the Nile only high enough in flood-time for strangers to venture up-river. Only small groups advanced, dependent on the goodwill of the natives, and lost if they could not get it. In thousand-year-old sagas, curiosity urged the suspicious adventurers onward, fear held them back.

And Rhamses the Great came up the river, founded cities and temples, settled the land with a colony of peasants and craftsmen, and glorified his own achievements, up there in Nubia, in statues and pictures. Queen Hatshepsut had frescoes painted showing negroes bringing her cattle and giraffes, lion skins and golden rings, with the gestures of the conquered. Remains go back into the four-hundredth century: about 2000 B.C. the Pharaohs once penetrated as far as the Blue Nile: and it is known that from 1900 to 1100 B.C. they ruled as far as the fourth cataract, and carried away gold and slaves.

But the Nile always rescued its children, or such as the strangers did not carry off. It wrecked the strangers' boats, and the natives arose and slew the intruders. But often, under the whip of the overseers, they had to bore shafts into the hills, follow the windings of the gold veins in the mountains, make the rock friable with fire, and then hack it out with picks. Why had they begotten sons only to work in the flickering light of the lamps, to seize the broken lumps of rock, and crawl up to the surface with them, where the women and old men were waiting to grind it to powder on millstones, till the pieces were as small as the lentils they reaped on the meagre riverside strips in flood-time? Then, on slanting stone tables, the dust had to be washed until all the lighter particles had been washed away, and a pale, shimmering tinsel was left, which the strangers mixed with lead and salt and melted

in earthenware pans for five days, and cooled down in the form of rings, plates, and tiles.

Thus, groaning in the glare, the most powerful tribes of Nubia were wasted away, till they rebelled and were beaten again, and their sons again bore the lot of slaves. When these mighty strangers tore the white ornamental feathers from the Nubian ostriches, drew the skins from the panthers, and loaded them on their camels, when they killed elephants for their tusks or forced these sinewy sons of the desert to sail downstream with them, so as to stand as guards in their public places, wrapped in strange, gaudy garments—all that could be understood. But what could the mighty lord care for wretched flakes of yellow metal, that they should sacrifice thousands of their slaves, half of whom had been destroyed by the desert and the river before others arrived to brandish the whip and then hold the pan. The Nubians did not know that the Pharaoh, in the flower of his youth, built a sarcophagus and a funeral chamber which contained thirty thousand pounds of gold, and all of it from Nubia.

But Rhamses, who in the thirteenth century glorified himself as "the king at whose name the gold issues from the mountains," had already laid his gold mines with such skill that they might be worked to-day; the cunning of these kings was as great as their greed. Their power was for a long time actually based on the gold of Nubia, the name of which means "the land of gold." And yet they had a premonition of the curse of gold. Priests warned the kings, for an inscription on the Lower Nile ran: "But gold is the body of the gods, and not your affair."

The curse came true. These Nubians, who, in their blissful life as nomads, had never turned downstream, awakened to anger and curiosity, unrest and revenge, and one day, when news came of a dispute among Egyptian kings, a Nubian

king called Pianki set out with his army, with boats and oxen, crossed the frontier, struggling and conquering, and in 750 B.C. entered Memphis and Thebes, became master of Egypt, like his sons and grandsons after him. These stronger, more savage conquerors from "the wretched land of Kush," who looked like Huns to the refined Egyptians, rapidly and roughly seized the power; inscriptions relate that the king did not deign to cast a glance at the beautiful women in the palace of Heliopolis, but complained of the bad feeding of his horses. One of these Nubian kings actually marched into Palestine from the delta of the Nile to help King Hezekiah against the Assyrian enemy. What an impression must have been made by the temples and buildings, the astronomers and navigators, by useful knowledge on these barbarians who, having invaded civilization in their savagery, were feared and hated there and driven out again, though laden with an enlightenment which had once only reached them in legend.

For the empire which, before and after these conquests, stretched from the cataracts far into the east of Nubia, generally called Meroë, with its capital Napata at the southern point of the great loop, this colony, never more than half subjected, had already raised to power Egyptian priests who had entered the country as refugees, prisoners, or scholars, and it was these priests who seem to have prompted their less civilized masters to undertake the campaigns of revenge into Egypt. But now when the conquerors returned to their Nubian home they sought more than ever to imitate Egyptian buildings and temples, customs and laws. King Pianki, who lauded his own deeds after the fashion of the Egyptian Pharaohs or the dictators of to-day, called himself, in an inscription on a gigantic temple, like all conquerors, "the Bringer of Peace to both lands, King of the North and South, Sun of Suns, Lord of

the Diadems," and had frescoes painted on which the God Amon hands him a sword, while he, in majestic progress, slaughters a dozen enemies.

For five hundred years this kingdom, between the third and fifth cataracts, was bound to Thebes and Amon, who, as the national god, intervened directly in the government of the state, and centuries after their brief rule down on the delta the kings of Napata still called themselves "Lord of Both Lands," just as the Pharaohs still glorified themselves as Lords of Nubia when they had long since lost their power over the country—the obstinate pleasantries of men in power who, on their statues, the visiting-cards of ancient times, would not abandon their claim to provinces long lost. But kings in those days were in the forefront of battle, and Thutmosis I, at the third cataract, stabbed with his own hands the enemy King of Nubia.

In later centuries their halo shrank, the priests ruled, Egyptian customs died out, the hieroglyphics, still no more than an official language, again yielded to a popular tongue of Nubia, which is only now being deciphered, the legendary King Cambyses came, no one knows how far, Greek writers praised the land of wonder with an enthusiasm which was all the greater because no one set out to find the facts, while, to make themselves completely invincible, the native kings withdrew from the southerly point of the loop to the fourth cataract, where Meroë, the new capital, protected by the Nile, was inaccessible. There, Strabo says, the handsomest, cleverest, or boldest men were chosen king. Later, it is true, weak kings, remote descendants of those ruder ancestors, obeyed the priests, who called their machinations commands of the gods, and even went so far, in the end, as to order the kings to kill themselves by divine decree, till at last a king, thus theocratically condemned, pulled himself together and slew

the chief priest, for disbelief and strength generally intensify each other.

Or else the priests would put a queen on the throne, at first as regent for her young son, though her rule continued long after he had come of age. But when, in the first century, one of these queens conquered parts of Upper Egypt and advanced as far as Philae and Assouan, a new people was already ruling over Egypt, and stronger than she: the Romans sent an army up the Nile to vindicate the name of their Emperor, for the queen had overthrown his statues. They advanced as far as the second cataract: after them, with the exception of an Arab army, no army succeeded in doing so for two thousand years. There the Nile stopped them.

Thus hate, revenge, and the fortunes of war swayed between the two Nile countries, till at last the Emperor Diocletian abandoned Nubia in A.D. 300.

XVI

Rich in palms, the narrow strip stretches along the river, which is now once more striving towards the north, rustling oases lie on the long road to the third cataract, over two hundred miles away from the fourth. Where corn flourishes, the birds abound, and on many a narrow field children stand on little platforms, scaring the birds away with twigs the livelong, burning day, while the tireless water-wheels sigh and the huge oxen of the country, whose skin hangs down under their necks like cloaks, turn without a groan for ten hours under the same sun, drawing up water, water. What they feel, whether they think, nobody knows, and man consoles himself with the thought that his slave, man or beast, knows no better. If, beside them, we see the white chargers of

Dongola, famous since ancient times, we weave a finer life about them, yet they, galloping by, always bridled, perhaps look with envy on the equanimity of the heavy beasts in their eternal round.

On this part of the loop, from the southern corner of which the caravans set out for the south, even in ancient times, the memorials of the ages grow more frequent.

In the neighbourhood of Dongola, a granite stone lies on the Nile bank, heedlessly thrown away when a clay hut was destroyed, which it had served as corner-stone when the Scottish troops lived there on their last campaign. Earlier, brown hands had used it to support a water-wheel whose history no inscription records. Those who made the water-wheel had taken it from an Arab grave, where it had, for a few decades, protected from the onslaughts of the vultures the body of a slave secretly buried there by some pious son. The slave's son had dragged it down by night from a fort which the Mamelukes had built to resist the advance of Mohamed Ali, and finally abandoned to his troops, but the Mamelukes had hacked it out of the corner of a mosque which Saladin had built in the twelfth century in the middle of the Nile valley, when, after a long peace, he had massacred all the bishops.

For over wide stretches of the Middle Nile valley the cross ruled for more than six centuries, and the stone may well have been the corner-stone of a church that King Silko of Dongola had built to the glory of the saints. At that time, Crusaders in coats of mail had tethered their fine white chargers to a ring, whose trace the stone has never quite lost, before entering the church to pray for the Madonna's protection against the dangers of the next desert ride. Then the knight would unloose his war-horse from the stone, gently spurring its soft flanks, but holding the stirrup with his big toe only. Before the stone was built into the church it helped to support

the porch of that temple of Phthur whose red sandstone columns on the edge of the palm-forest still reveal in their ruins that Greek hands raised it there late in time, and probably dedicated it to Ares, whose Roman name too makes a fantastic appearance in this kingdom of Meroë. But the slaves who built the temple had taken the stone from the pedestal of the giant statue which has, since time immemorial, lain prone on the beach of Dongola, the statue of some Pharaoh whose name no one knows.

Thus they passed away, civilization and religions, conquerors and conquered, and yet they had all worshipped light and power, under varying symbols and names, even those who saw power in pity. In fortresses and mosques, in temples and barracks, all had sought to magnify their own lives, had passed and fallen with the places of their glory, and only the stone, the eternal granite from the banks of the Nile, has outlived everything, the pressure from above, the work of the chisel, the holes for the ring, the water-wheels, the tombs, the ages. In primeval repose it lies on the banks of the river, which rushes by in primeval movement, yet cannot break it.

Close below Dongola the granite again rises to ward off the water: there it splits the river with the longest of all the islands in the Nile—Argo, which is twenty-two miles long, and, where the river forces it to end, throws out a short row of islets and another spit of rock, which again churn up the Nile into roaring spray in seven rapids.

Here on the third cataract, seven hundred miles below Khartoum, the Nile valley changes, the plain grows milder, the river narrows, the hippopotamus grows rare, and the approach of civilization makes itself felt in the superior organization of the bands of robbers. Chains of hills approaching from the east, causing the sudden westward curve of the Nile, a higher mountain ridge, where it even occasionally



[Lehnert & Landrock]

THE NILE AT PHILAE



rains in winter, and again the rocky chasms and gorges on the river itself, mingled from now on with green and red porphyry, the many twists and turns which make the river completely unnavigable—all this encourages the robbers to play their tricks on the traveller approaching on horse or camel.

Here the natives are less skilled in navigation than those higher up. Their rafts of four slightly bent palm-trunks, badly propelled by oars split at the top, often founder, for here, where the Nile sometimes narrows to a width of eighty yards, so that the practised Nubian can throw a stone across it, the whirlpools and rocks which squeeze it in prevent any navigation for over a hundred miles in the rocky valley which the Arabs, in their plastic speech, call "The Life of Stone." There the Nubian has learnt to swim as no white man can swim; with his spear tied flat on his head he swims across the river: on the steepest part of the bank he can only reach his narrow field by swimming, to stick a few seeds or beans in the muddy earth and to reap the harvest, which he carries over to his hut on his head. Nowhere, save in the Arctic Ocean, is life so difficult to maintain.

If he has a hut, two oxen and four goats, he already calls it an oasis in this region: a water-wheel is a token of wealth, a palm the sign of Allah's blessing. Among these most poverty-stricken signs of the life of to-day, mighty signs of past power rise from the splendid solitude, and yet the giant columns which Amenophis, Thutmosis, and Sesostris here erected to their glory, even then stood on no market-place and on no trade route. Between black rocks and the shrill yellow desert, in the heat and the glare, amid a poverty which even then did not look idyllic, the megalomania of the Pharaohs glorified itself by the labour of thousands of slaves: if they could thus dispense with awe-stricken spectators, if they realized that

there were nothing but a few hundred naked cowherds and gaunt peasants to gape at the record of their greatness, they may well be credited with a feeling of their own likeness to the gods which made them think and build for thousands of years to come. The situation of such a monument tells us the astounding fact that in the time of Amenophis III the Nile bed was twenty-five feet higher; that is the work of the water in three thousand years.

Perhaps only one inscription may have been interpreted to the naked brown men from generation to generation; it stood on the granite column just above Wadi Halfa, where the cataracts cease and the Nile becomes navigable. For there a Pharaoh thunders: "From this spot, to all eternity, no negro shall sail down the Nile."

There at the second cataract, nearly a thousand miles below Khartoum, when this warning curse was pronounced, lay the southern frontier of Egypt, and there it lies to-day. This second, most magnificent cataract of the Nile, without vegetation, volcanic, looks, in its confusion, like a maze. Approaching this wide picture of water and stone—the Nile has here once more become very broad—one could imagine it a collection of petrified hippos, whose wet backs, rising from the water, glisten in the sun, for the water has rounded everything, and a soft swirl round each of the blocks increases the illusion.

Seen from the rock of Abu Sir, which rises on the western bank, the whole looks more rock than water: in winter, three hundred and fifty rock islands have been counted, and even in flood-time more than one hundred rise above the water. More than fifty are inhabited by men in clay huts: there are, too, a few strong, old acacias, which have outlived many floods. The fields the inhabitants have rescued and sown with beans and lentils look like the children's beds in a garden.

Their owners row or sail over to them twice a year to sow and reap.

Below, the little town of Wadi Halfa, which means the "grassy valley," stretches along the Nile bank, densely populated, with white house-fronts reflected in the water, and dominated by a hill on the left bank which looks like a sea cliff. Palms wave, sailing boats glide downstream, everything seems enlivened by the railway which begins, the navigation which ends here, by the frontier of two countries. The green flag of Egypt waves with fresh self-assurance, for from this point downward it waves alone.

The Nile has overcome its third adventure, the cataracts. Broad and slow, in a majestic mood such as it has not known since Khartoum, it enters Egypt.

XVII

This is not yet Egypt proper, for the country from Wadi Halfa to Assouan, known as Lower Nubia, stretching for two hundred and twenty miles along the sharp easterly curve of the Nile, is the poorest part of Egypt, a desolate country in which the desert often borders the river, by which the cultivated patches seldom reach a width of more than a hundred yards. In these unfruitful stretches the life of the Egyptian fellah resembles that of his brother on the cataracts: both are Nubians, both are dependent on the water-wheel and the Nile silt, only that here there are neither palms nor granite to be turned into houses, and the Nile must serve for the houses too. Hence the form of the pylon, which we still call Egyptian, and which was first created out of Nile mud, like the sand-castles the children build on the beach.

The ancient Egyptians saw in Lower Nubia merely a land

of passage to the Soudan, from which they took slaves and gold, and since all later peoples could only move southwards up the Nile, many civilizations have left grotesque mixtures behind them. Shortly after Wadi Halfa, on the right bank, the ruins of a medieval fortress lie by the side of a rock temple in which early Egyptian reliefs are painted over with pictures of Christian saints: the ram's head of the god Chnum gazes out side by side with Saint Epimachus: on one wall a Pharaoh is suckled by the god Anuket, on the other, Jesus lies at His mother's breast. A threatening Byzantine Christ stretches his hand from the roof, but close beside it, King Haremhab stands in the presence of his god Thout. Beside the remains of a Nubian fort of the Meroë epoch lie the fragments of a Hathor temple, with graves of Moslems by its side. Further down, a Coptic priest, Abraham, in the Temple of Derr, wrote amid the images of Egyptian gods that a Nubian king had made him raise the cross here: a medley of priests and kings, gods and slaves, saints and peasants, who fought bloody fights for the name and form of God and now, recalled by Him, are all the same desert sand.

At varying altitudes the two deserts approach the banks of the river in varying proximity, and their different colour is not only an effect of the light: the western, Libyan desert is golden-yellow with brown mountains, the more rocky eastern one, the Arabian desert, is grey-brown. Between them, broad sandbanks hamper the heavy way of the steamers.

The steamers are white and shallow: their black coal has most likely come all the long way from Newcastle, and as, in the land without rain, the boilers stay half-open, the whole looks rather like a railway train on the river. At its side the shallow-draught steamer leads a second, where the coloured travellers sit, but on both boats the passenger thinks: "The other is second-class." Slowly the two linked steamers glide

side by side on the river, a picture of the enforced community of white and brown men, for on the white boat is the engine, the brain which governs the journey, but the hands which stoke it are brown, like the passengers on the other boat, and yet it is this second boat that carries the products of the country northwards.

Forty miles below Wadi Halfa, where the heights of the Libyan desert run close down to the left bank of the Nile, between the hills and the water, there appear four colossal statues of yellow stone: each represents the same man, four times repeated, sitting in front of a temple wall, a god, a king—maybe a golem. There he sits, facing the rising sun, as he has sat these three thousand years, since he was hewn out of the yellow rock—at whose command? Did some son here enshrine his victorious father for posterity, or a hero his protecting god? Did some queen here give immortal form to her heroic son? Or is it the monument of some ruler, whose people wished, after his death, to dedicate him to the gods?

It was none of these. It was Rhamses II who here immortalized himself, and as his reign of sixty-seven years gave him time to attend to his glory, as he, in seven places in Egypt, erected the greatest temples to himself and his gods, among which this one, on the southern frontier by Abu Simbel, looks small, he gave the greatest examples of self-idolization known to ancient history, and would hardly be Rhamses the Great to-day if it were not for this highly imaginative publicity which, as a modern dictator has betrayed, lies in the perpetual repetition of one's own name. Later emperors may have been presented to their people by their priests as ambassadors of the gods, or by their scholars as the fountain of wisdom, but how humble they look, how humble even our tribunes of to-day look, beside the king who hewed

his own statue, seventy feet high, four times out of the rock to sit close beside his gods!

For it is really he, Rhamses with the long nose of history, the gentle face and the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, and as he turns his face directly east, without anger, with an expression of repose, his hands on his knees, he looks like some giant, fearless of the sun's rays, who now, after the stillness of the night, is looking down on the awakening life in the Nile valley. Before his eyes, against the crude blue of the sky, a narrow green barley field stands out, with its water-wheel in front of it still whining through the ages, turned by the slow-moving pair of oxen; a woman in a floating black veil carries her earthenware pitcher to the river: the water is blue, with ripples of silver in the morning breeze, a white sail glides towards the bank, the boy clambers up the mast to furl it, and downstream, where the river narrows, the deep yellow edge of the desert almost collides with the muddy bank.

For however old and mighty the Pharaoh may have been who had himself gigantically enthroned there four times, the Nile is a thousand times older and mightier, and from its eternal movement in this morning hour, through the year and through the ages, Pharaoh received all his power. But look—in actual fact there are only three of him left: the upper sandstone part of the fourth has fallen at his feet, and the mighty king looks as if rebellious slaves had quartered him.

But what is that standing between the legs of the three and a half colossal kings? They are his family, his wife and children; one even represents his mother who, by a grotesque reversal of nature, has come to stand between the giant legs of her son. There, between his legs, Rhamses has inscribed his name, and on his arms and his neck-ring too, but then the leaders and mercenaries of later peoples came by, wished

to earn their share of glory, and inscribed their deeds on the limbs and pedestal of the old king, while below, we read: "We wrote this, Archon, son of Amoibichos, and Pelekos, son of Udamos." There they stand, poor, unknown lieutenants, who once came adventuring here, and have become more famous than the great king between whose toes they inscribed their doings, for many a wanderer in the East can read their Greek, but only a few scholars can decipher the hieroglyphics.

Inside in the rocky cave, however, Rhamses could proclaim by pictures on the walls what a demigod he was, while, to provide for all contingencies, he had himself sculptured again in a row of statues thirty feet high. Nowhere is the hawk-headed sun-god as big as the statue of the king, but even on the frescoes, where the king brings human offering, he holds towards him, at the same time, his own, idolized name in the form of a picture. Then he had himself painted with a god handing him a sword, or he is slaying an enemy, storming a fortress, shooting down from the battlements on the enemy imploring mercy, commanding his officers to count the enemy hands cut off in battle, or leading the conquered before his image.

At times this self-idolatry rises to art. In Greek slenderness, the king is slaying an enemy, with his foot already resting on a conquered foe, or he is listening to a woman who has tenderly grasped his forearm, or two goddesses, in modern evening dress, each holding the key of life, are blessing the queen with upraised arms. Suggestion plays a great part in such impressions, when the rays of the morning sun strike through the door of the vault into the holy of holies, or the electric searchlight from the steamer lifts the whole out of its magic night into sudden vision. Since the whole is ten times over-instrumented, since all that these booming records have to tell has less appeal for us than the sight of their

beautiful hieroglyphics, since the names of all these Hittites, Nubians, or Libyans only reach our ears like the distant surge of the sea, nothing would draw us to these documents of royal madness if it were not that they had preserved the life of their time in scenes which might have been drawn by the hand of a child.

There are soldiers and slaves, Egyptians and their enemies living in camp, feeding their horses: in the neighbouring Temple of Derr, beside the same Rhamses, refugees are carrying their wounded from the heights, while their people wait for them, mournful and still. Negroes bring monkeys and greyhounds, ostriches and giraffes, elephant tusks and gold to the king: a woman carries a child in a basket fastened to a band round her forehead, one of the wounded is being led back to the village, where his wife is cowering by the fire, and on the fortress wall another is standing with her child in her arms. Why are all these scenes in the minor key more impressive than the strident major of the giant king who has become a god?

Perhaps the uneasy feeling that arises in us at the sight of the ruler's splendour amid this desolation comes from the river itself, on whose banks he set it up.

XVIII

For now the Nile is urged on to a new adventure, its fourth, and as it cannot now see the great enemy, but only the consequences of his mischief, the feeling of oppression grows. A pressure is brought to bear on the river more terrifying than at the great waterfall or in the swamps of its youth, stranger than in the cataracts of its middle age: the Nile rises steadily, and yet receives no rain! For two hundred and

twenty miles, counting upstream from Assouan, the Nile rises, and yet cannot feel the great flood which the summer rain, in those distant alps, brings yearly to the Blue Nile. No; it is stemmed by mysterious powers, and if memory lives in it, it can recall no year in all the ages in which it rose in winter, to inundate what had just been land, as it has now done for thirty years. And what deepens the riddle is that it rises at harvest-time, but in summer, when the flood comes, it sinks.

The strips near the bank show clearly how rapidly it has changed in winter: palm-tops rise above the water which cannot have grown out of the Nile: the keel of the steamer glides close by crumbling walls, as if Vineta had been submerged here, but they were only poor clay huts, and the mud of which the peasants built them now returns to its father, the Nile. The tips of water-wheels stick out of the water, islands form where palms have fallen and collected mud, but they are no longer the floating islands of the upper swamps. The earlier inhabitants sail over in little boats to other, old islands, now under water, and the boys climb on to the projecting palm-tops which still bear fruit, although for nine months of the year they stand up to the neck in the water.

But above, on the heights near the new bank, there stand new, bald houses of mud, of stone too—granite again sets in here—looking doubly blind in their new whitewash, like fortresses on old copper plates, for they are windowless, the sun cannot light up their fronts, odd, serrated battlements make them look still more uninhabited, like the models of some engineer who tried here to change the face of the landscape. Women come down from the heights to sow their little green patch on the bank, and the solidified mud, which forms the edge of the bank, is like a firm quay, along which they ride on their little asses—always women, for the men

are washing dishes or cleaning streets in Cairo: they are regarded as less intelligent and more honest than the Lower Egyptians, and since Kitchener's officers used them for batmen they have emigrated to the Soudan, though only for a year, after which they go back to their wives.

The fortunes of the peasants, between these steep, unfertile banks, rise and fall: the dam in Assouan has been raised twice, each time thousands of houses and homes were submerged. They were offered land in the fertile land of Egypt, but they would not relinquish their old, tough earth of mud and stones, on which their fathers had walked and perished. Thus new dwellings constantly appear in higher parts, the old palm below is their own, and even though they can only reach it by boat, it is, all the same, the palm of their fathers, on whose dates they wish to live.

Hilly peninsulas have been formed, between which the river has run into little fiords, on whose edges the ruins of former villages still look out, to be inundated in their turn next month. Here, in February, there are green stretches of fifty yards—rare ones reach three hundred—but the Nubians have to hide their corn high up near the new houses, so that the winter flood shall not carry it away.

In the little towns which, standing rather high, have not yet been flooded, in El Derr, where the great loop of the Nile really first comes to an end, close by in Korosko, above which the river is forced into a peculiar, quite short south-east turn, both lying on fertile land on the eastern bank, there, where a dozen palm-trunks spring from a single root, the people seem fresher, more healthy, the market is busy, the houses shimmer white from out the yellow acacias. Where once the camels were loaded which, with good luck, would reach Abu Hamed in a week, on that chord of the Nile arc which was later followed by the railway, where the Mecca

pilgrims once rode off to the Red Sea, the little Fords hoot through the narrow streets, and the last fine camels of Kordofan stand gloomily by the wayside, as if they knew that they are worth only £2 now, instead of £10, and that in Cairo they are even sent with humiliation to the slaughter-house, while their fathers bore General Gordon and Colonel Kitchener on their backs, and carried the first emissaries of civilization into the wild plains of the Soudan.

And the hampered stream widens and widens: here on the frontier of Egypt proper, on the Tropic of Cancer, the Nile becomes a lake. It is a fantastic scene, gleaming grey, without a plant, of stones, hills and islands, with grotesque rocks, all polished, in round, strange heaps, the heavy stones towering up on the flat ones, here like columns, there like mountains. Thus here, above the first cataract, the cataract of Assouan, the scenery of the second is repeated, but magnified into measurelessness, for here there is no question of river banks, but only of distant coasts of dull red granite round about this half-petrified lake, from which the drowned palms raise their tops, like the drowned souls in a vision of Dante. No one would be surprised if this lake took fire, so unreal do the glistening, smooth sides of the rock look, rising from its uncannily swollen breadth, and even the white train, waiting over in Shellal, looks like a creeping dragon, lying on the bank, ready to pounce on the traveller landing from the lake.

Yet over the surface of this Nile lake, as if they knew no fear, the sails of the first pure Egyptians glide like happy birds, with gaudy Arab pennants at the mast and stern, sweeping by the tops of the sunken palms: the steersman, standing erect, with his upper arm on the great tiller, leans against the north wind, his white shirt fluttering back like the tunic of the Winged Victory, while the reddish rock

behind him reaches to his hips, and the piercing yellow of the desert glides past his head in the background. But what strange capitals is his boat approaching?

Pylons and columns, ornamented with reliefs, painted and perfectly preserved, stretch their heads out of the middle of the colourless, petrified lake: the fragments of a fantasy rising from the past, and forgetting the commandments of to-day, shadows of faded memories of ancient gods, dream-pictures of a romantic mind mourning for the sunken. Such are the thoughts which flit round the mind of the traveller approaching the island of Philae by boat, in winter, when the water stands high, while on the architrave of Osiris, close above the surface of the water, a black and white wagtail rocks, a proud Pharaoh already bathes his legs in the Nile, while only the crown of Isis can rise above the flood. Softly the oar strikes against the rafter of a lower room, but the pieces that have been hacked away show that here, too, one god drove out the other, and that the jealousy of the priests wrought more havoc than the flood into which the Temple of Philae has only been sinking for thirty years. Only when autumn comes on, when the opened dam leads the Nile back into its natural bounds, do the temples stand high and dry as once they stood, but then a grey-green layer of mud has veiled the walls, and transformed the festive halls into the dwellings of frigid Undines.

When these temples still rose above the waters, Egyptians and Nubians here, by the graves of their gods, swore solemn treaties of peace, and now where the rock-martin builds her nest, the lovely arm of Cleopatra may for a moment have rested on the hand of a cowering slave. Then for a time the Greek gods held sway here, and the Emperor Hadrian, who wished in any case to stand well with the Egyptian gods, and here, far from Rome, worshipped Isis and Horus,

had the source of the Nile painted on one of the walls: there the Nile god, with his snake at the foot of a rock, sits pouring water out of two pitchers, with a vulture and a falcon looking on at this romantic birth of the Nile.

And Isis still found a refuge here at the southernmost corner of her domain, while Christ was already dominating the delta. Then priests bore the image of the Madonna among the Egyptian gods, and after them the disciples of Mohammed overthrew those images, putting in their place the text without an image. And these graceful buildings, smaller, more elegant than all the others, built in the decadence of the second century, unclassical temples, gay and bright with colour, like a scene from *The Magic Flute*, still stood here in the middle of the Nile, unscathed by the elements. They were still standing when the French chiselled their names into the Ptolemaic walls, taking care to place them high up, so that they can be seen on the eastern pylon from the boat: in the fashion of the Pharaohs, they praise their own victory of the Pyramids, and the generals had their names set underneath, but the name of Napoleon was scratched out by some excited English visitor. Then some devotee of Napoleon renewed it, and inscribed above: "Une page de l'histoire ne doit pas être salie"—a weighty lesson for zealots of our day

If we climb one of the pylons by the iron ladders and now, towards evening, turn west, the beautiful colours of the temple are repeated in nature: the Nile lake looks pastel-blue, the few palms above it grey-green, the near mountains dark orange with blue-green shadows, the desert pink, the distant mountains violet. In the grey-blue western sky a veiled moon follows the sun, while the northern sky spreads from its purple edge through a path of pink cloud to bright green light ending above, at the zenith, in the golden promise of an arrowy strip, hailing the last gifts of day. A few minutes

later, and the light fades, the mountains turn dun, the boundless Nile lake sinks in shadow.

Suddenly a long row of lights flames up. Hundreds of lamps cut through the twilight like a knife, illuminating the huge wall they stand on. A spark has fallen into this dreaming, primeval world. A building has cut through it all, to destroy it. Chaos yields: an ordering will has flashed its way through in light and stone, the colours of the sky and the temple, the monsters of stone, have vanished: a fanfare has drowned all their sound. It is a grey stone dam, a mile long, which shuts off the lake to the north. Now the water, so to speak, reaches its neck, it just overtops it, like the pylon on which we are standing. On the other side of this piercing line the eye discerns white waterfalls at isolated points, all of the same width, in a row, then again interrupted, revealing a system.

This is the dam, the culprit that spread unrest through a couple of hundred miles of Lower Nubia, deprived thousands of peasants of their houses, driving them on to the stony hills, that drowned all the palms, and in the end the temple of Philae too, on whose still unshaken columns we stand. This is the great construction by which men mastered the element, the bold invention which has determined the fate of the Nile upstream and downstream. It is the point at which its freedom ends.

It is the dam of Assouan.

XIX

The struggle with man had imperilled the Nile along its middle course, but had nowhere changed it: it had been beaten neither in the swamps nor at the cataracts. In agony

and wildness, it had withstood the temptations of the plain, broken the resistance of the rocks, had even eluded the hand of man, setting at nought his schemes for canals, his attempts at navigation. When, in Wadi Halfa, it had quitted the last cataract but one, with its biggest discharge it might have been some king among rivers which, mightier than those haughty Pharaohs, silent, with rare outbursts, had bid defiance to rock, swamp, and desert, which had saved itself.

Then it had plunged into this last adventure, more terrible than all the others because the river could not ward off the invisible enemy: it had swelled and risen in dread, and, while it seemed to be spreading beyond all bounds, the river was appalled. For as, in its steady rise, it overflowed the banks of the desert, it could not but feel the whole as oppression, not as liberation, till a fearful wall stood before it, an inexorable stone bulwark, the great enemy which was not to be overcome because its strength was blended with cunning. While desert and rock had in vain striven to grasp and conquer the stream, men were wiser—they sought not to throttle, but to command.

In Assouan the Nile has run to its end the adventurous part of its course; here the beauty of anarchy ceases, now it is tamed, it turns useful. Now the element which could not be broken by the elements is seized and bent by human hands in the way the brain of a single man has devised, the will of a single man resolved. The effect of the dam is so powerful that it does not merely govern the last quarter of the river, which begins here, but, by what it does and what it can do, it influences the whole Nile backwards to the source, more than three thousand miles upstream. Everything that it has lived through, that has been described, is given a new meaning by the dam of Assouan. What it does for Egypt, its Faust-like achievement, belongs to Egypt. Now

the moment has come to consider the Nile upwards as an element, as what it is, as water. This is the only way to grasp why the turn of its fate should come in Assouan.

Where does the water come from that is dammed at Assouan? When and how abundantly will it flow to-morrow? The engineer in Assouan must know everything that nature in its vagaries betrays to him of the upper river before he can decide how much water he can pass through his sluices to the lower river, what he must reserve, when and how much. In his little room, the brain of the whole sits with pencils, maps, and logarithmic tables, and every morning the white tape oozing out of the morse apparatus reports the water-level on both Niles, up to Roseires and Malakal, and on these data he takes his decisions and gives his orders. Then he wires to Assouan how many sluices the engineer must open that day.

But if the measurements are taken up river, why is no attempt made to master the element higher up, to dam the young and Middle Nile? Looked at from this fateful spot in Assouan, how does the youth of the river appear? What is the significance of the lakes, swamps, and cataracts, what is the significance of the duality of the two Niles, from the point of view of the great dam that controls all their moods?

In answer, we must change the tone and standpoint of our whole story. While up to now the Nile has dominated, and will do so again in Egypt, this interlude gives some play to the observer. We are standing on the dam looking upstream and considering, here on the Tropic of Cancer, what has to be done on the Equator for the sake of this dam. The problems are new: the great dam has been standing for only thirty years, and many considerations must be left to the future.

Like the two Niles, the two lakes from which the White

Nile issues are rivals as sources. The mountains in which Lake Albert has its home are an important factor: its system on the western edge of the Great African Rift, fed by the mighty alps of the Ruwenzori, has an important influence on the volume of the White Nile. Calculating the combined area of these two source lakes of the White Nile, the result is an area of nearly four hundred thousand square miles of land feeding the tiny cultivated area of Egypt, which measures less than twelve thousand. In actual fact, only half of Egypt's water originates in the two lakes, and even this half comes only partially from the rivers feeding them.

For the basin of Lake Victoria is not filled by its horizontal inflow: with the exception of the Kagera, the tributaries are choked by papyrus and prevented for months from flowing into the lake. It is the rain from above that fills Lake Victoria; the old legends which told that the Nile came from Heaven revealed the truth under a metaphor. Lake Victoria, half as big again as Switzerland, combines the advantage of extent with the disadvantage of corresponding evaporation, so that the effects of its gigantic dimensions are neutralized. The gain and loss from rain and evaporation in Lake Victoria are about four times the gain and loss from feeders and outflows—symbols of a great character whose nature and destiny are ruled by powers beyond the earth and not by its fathers and sons.

To transform this huge lake into a reservoir which would safeguard its steadiness for Egypt, it would only be necessary to build a dam at its outflow, the Ripon Falls, and thus store up water for the low years. But then all the water thus stored would have to pass through the sponge of Lake Kioga and other swampy stretches, and would still lose relatively as much as now, when the outflow is free.

Hence, at the moment, plans for an upper dam tend to

concentrate at Lake Albert. This much smaller lake, that has little swamp, forms, with its steep banks, an ideal natural reservoir, which with a dam only three feet in height could store five and a half milliard cubic metres of water, that is, more than in Assouan. As the banks are for the most part steep here, such a process would not increase the area of the lake and hence its evaporation: the dam might rather regularize the surface of Lake Albert. But then how could the young Nile be kept navigable, since it rises for the second time at the northern corner of Lake Albert? Hence arises the question as to whether the dam should be built immediately below the outflow from Lake Albert, at Packwatch, or only a hundred and twenty miles lower down, at Nimule.

For the young mountain stream, along this first reach below Lake Albert, takes up so many mountain brooks, and is so much swollen by them in the rainy season, that by the time it reaches Mongalla its volume is doubled. But the Nile is a real adventurer: it loses in one week what it won the week before. On its passage through the swamps, it again loses on an average half what it has just received, and would arrive, so to speak, empty-handed, if the Bahr-el-Ghazal were not there to come to its help at the last moment. This wasting of its substance in the swamps is so great that of 14 million cubic metres of water, 13·5 million are wasted in a few months, and with this waste Egypt could be made two to three times as big as it is. Thus, in the end, the Jebel and Ghazal only contribute one-tenth to the total volume of the Nile.

But since the tributaries have next to no slope on their lower course, and all discharge into swamp, there comes into being this strangest swamp-land on earth, where a single hippo, trampling down a path in the evening, can cause a bank to burst, and so divert the course of a river. What is there to be done? A "Pharaoh plan" has been devised, called

after the Pharaoh Menes, who once proceeded in a similar way on the Lower Nile. It is the quickest and cheapest way of preventing the loss of water in the swamps.

On the left bank of the Jebel, a stone dam would be erected, thirty feet wide, six feet high, running from Rejaf to Malakal: on the right bank of the Ghazal, a second would be built: in this way, half of the present swamps would be cut off from the Jebel water. The latter, compressed into half its area, pushed against the Bahr-el-Zeraf, and hence rising, would swell the swamps on that side. As the ground rises slightly here—that is, towards the east—the eastern swamps would be further increased, the western, on the Ghazal, reduced. These two Pharaonic dams, five hundred and fifty miles in length, to be constructed in six years at the cost of a million pounds, would cut off half the swamps: if only half of this half were saved in its turn, the loss of water in the swamps, which amounts on an average to fifteen milliard cubic metres, would be reduced by a quarter, and that might be of great advantage to Egypt in bad years.

As long as this great plan remains unrealized, the swamps suck the Upper Nile empty, and Egypt depends on the water flowing into the Nile below the swamps, that is, first and foremost, the Sobat. This brings down a great deal of water from Abyssinia, and is thus dependent on Alpine rains, being negligible in winter, swollen and turbulent in summer. A slight change of climate, and the last remains of the water from the great lakes might trickle away in the swamps: the Nile would then be a purely Abyssinian stream.

The waterless Nile, having lost its all in the swamps like a business man in some daring enterprise, is saved by the advent of the Sobat, which arrives close below the mouth of the Ghazal and Zeraf, at the moment of deepest distress. It is true that the Sobat has been reduced by its own floods

on its upper course: thus its maximum flow is retarded till November, although its upper course begins to rise in April. Nevertheless, when it falls into the Nile, it is so abundant that it completely stems the scanty main stream in autumn, even throwing it back as far as Lake No. In actual fact, no Nile water flows to Khartoum in the second half of the year, but only Sobat water.

Meanwhile, the mainly Abyssinian water of the Sobat and its sons is creeping slowly along the bed and under the name of the White Nile to Khartoum.

XX

The Nile seems to turn all the laws of Nature upside down, yet just because of that, Nature can achieve her purposes. Flowing almost without a slope through deserts and swamps, it still does not evaporate: in summer, when other rivers dry up, it reaches its high water-level, reversing in Egypt the normal round of the seasons: less abundant than either the Congo or the Danube, it keeps going in much more difficult circumstances: crawling endlessly through rainless lands, it is all the same copious enough to supply the place of rain. To do this, Nature has invented a trick—the double river, the brother pair.

Which of the two Niles is the main stream can no more be decided than which is the leading spirit of a pair of inventors. In the Curie couple or the brothers Wright, mathematics and imagination, intuition and research clearly had to combine in order that the goal should be reached: thus these brothers too bear the palm between them. The White Nile is certainly the slower, but just because of that it saves Egypt, since, owing to the slowness of its slope,

the water of the grave river is delayed and only reaches Khartoum from August to December, while the swift Blue Nile hurls its waters down from July to September. The White Nile would certainly never overflow its banks without the Blue, and agriculture in Egypt would be limited to the riverside strip and the water-wheel, but without the White Nile the Blue would let Egypt perish of thirst in the dry months when it carries only a little subterranean water. Nature has invented something wiser than an uninteresting "victory of the stronger." The elder of the brothers keeps life going, the younger is the genius.

The native intemperance of the Blue Nile is revealed in all the figures. While the proportion of maximum and minimum of discharge during the year on the White Nile is 1:5, on the Blue it is 1:500. While the water coming to Egypt can be reckoned in advance from December to May because it comes from the White Nile, nobody knows how high the flood on the Blue Nile will be in June, or what the alps and the monsoons will be at. A creative, yet moody character, the Blue Nile suddenly withdraws almost completely from the common work, and in return, does it all when it feels inclined, for in August and September, two-thirds of all the water in Khartoum belongs to the Blue Nile, one-sixth to the Atbara, and only one-sixth to the White Nile.¹ On a view of the whole water-discharge, the Bahr-el-Jebel might be regarded as the source-river of the White, the Blue Nile as that of the whole. And the White Nile, moreover, is never white, the Blue Nile never blue. The White looks green in spring, reddish later, and is not clear even in winter: the Blue Nile is chocolate-brown in flood, clearing later: the names only fit a general comparison of the ground-tones.

Yet the true genius of the Blue Nile is not displayed in

¹ The flood of summer, 1935, was the biggest for forty years.

the headlong rush of its waters, but in their composition: that it descends from volcanic mountains, transforming the debris of the Abyssinian basalt into life-giving silt, there neither the White Nile nor any river in Europe can imitate it. The people on the Ganges are well aware of the value of the silt, and if a great flood destroys the crops there, the Indians smile in Brahminical equanimity, for they know that the earth will be so much the more fertile next year. In Egypt, they knew six thousand years ago that the Nile mud had formed the delta, and created the harvest anew every year.

The White Nile, too, brings solid substances in suspension down with it: the percentage of the solubles is even about equal to that of the Blue Nile, but what it brings is mostly vegetable, because the swamps have acted like a huge filter, the slope is less steep, the long islands hold up the debris and the clayey soil cannot be broken up. But the Sobat which, as a half-Abyssinian river, carries silt with it, loses most of this silt up in its own swamps.

The solid substances, especially, which the White Nile and Sobat carry down have already been deposited along their flat reaches and in the swamps, and as the Blue Nile only brings them along with the flood, 86 per cent of all the solids in the Nile waters are carried through in the two months of August and September. In the cataracts, the Nile tears along eroded masses of basalt, granite, and chalk, and even thickens its silt with desert sand. But what is putrescent in it—for it contains 9 per cent of organic substances—is destroyed during the desert journey by the dryness of the air. Thus the desert strengthens the power of its enemy, the water, and everything that is left stranded when the flood subsides—dead fish and all kinds of decaying bodies—is quickly devoured by the birds.

The Blue Nile, raging downwards, lays violent hold of

tokens of its rush—as it were messengers from its country—and tears them along with it. When, for miles beyond the river banks, rifts and ravines, landslides and water-channels are formed, when, from the walls, mud oozes down perpetually, and the river below swells to a torrent, its friable banks fall in and are dissolved, and the whole rushes to the valley like a catastrophe. The debris of Abyssinian volcanoes, the soil from the collapse of valley walls, desert sand which, borne far by the wind, is mixed with the stream of mud, ashes from bush-fires which the wild Ethiopians have set alight to renew their pastures and keep off the elephants in the canyons of the southern Abbai—all this streams for months through the plains and deserts of Nubia, first black, then grey, to call forth much later from the soil of rainless Egypt the swiftest, at times the richest crops on earth, and the cotton speculator in Manchester is dependent, in his calculations, on the whims of a wild river which no human eye has seen in its entirety from its source to its mouth.

This great natural spectacle has found a symbol in itself: the Nile silt contains gold: even to-day it is occasionally washed near the Soudanese frontier, but there is too little of it to tempt the prospector. The incalculable value which the silt later transforms into gold has been worked out by experts and its fertilizing power assessed at £1 10s. od. per acre in Egypt. The Nile silt has magnetic power owing to its high iron oxide content, while its fertility is further increased by the high temperatures.

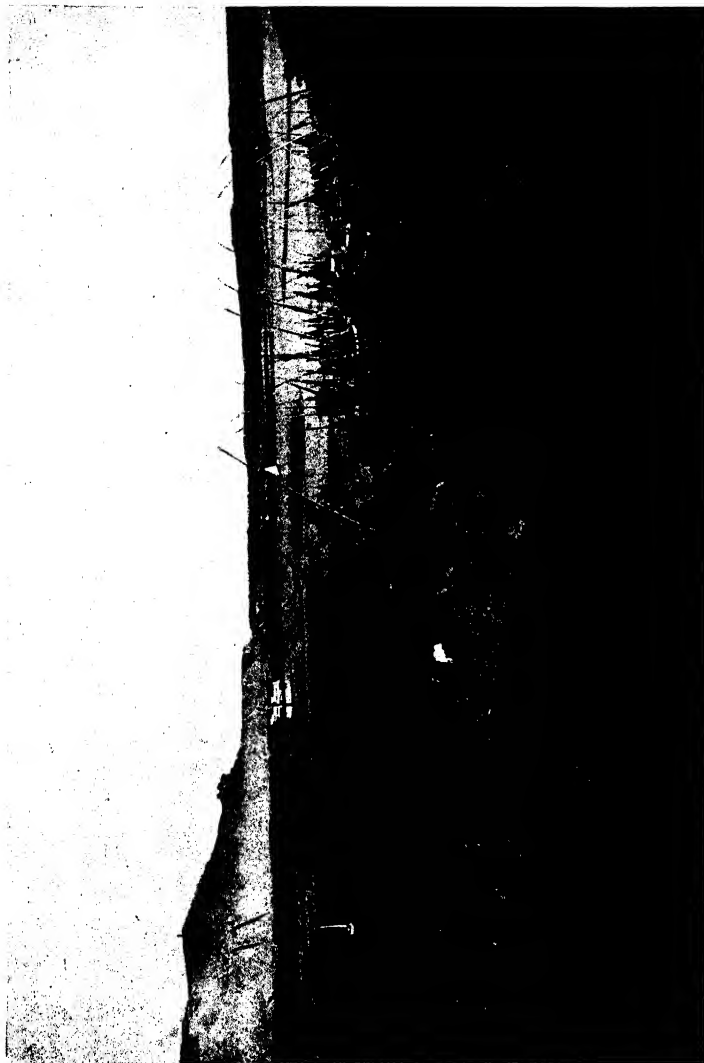
Such is the nature of the great gift of the Abyssinian rains—one might say, too, of the Atlantic. If the Nile silt is the male, fertilizing element, it finds ready in the Egyptian soil everything from which it can call forth life. The earth has cracked in the dry season, the air has penetrated into all the clefts which have elsewhere to be torn open by the plough-

share, and the unploughed earth, between the harvests, has received a quantity of fertilizing matter. Far below, the next flood can loosen what is necessary for growth, at the same time depositing the silt and diluting the salt contained in the lower layers.

Thousands of years before the silt had been transformed into crops by man, it had created the delta, and thousands of years before that it had forged its way through the desert. And the first figures of its rise to have been preserved are older than any historical records of the Western world: they go back six thousand years, and have remained, on the whole, constant, for the real revolution in the course of the Nile was made by the hands of men and begun only a hundred years ago.

In those days, just as to-day and yesterday, as we can see by the frescoes in the tombs of the Pharaohs, the corn-seed was cast into the mud after the flood; two months later, the harvest was gathered in. We can see on these frescoes dams enclosing basins, just as they do to-day, and it can be concluded from signs and inscriptions by what statecraft the water, after the lapse of fixed periods, was conveyed from one basin into another, to carry the fertilizing silt farther on. Forty years ago, before the dam at Assouan was built, the day on which the first waves of the Blue Nile were leaving Abyssinia was still celebrated, just as five thousand years ago. Only the name has changed. Once the priests told the people that in summer, Isis, mourning for her brother Osiris, shed her tears into the Nile, and so the river rose. To-day the engineers wire from Roseires to Cairo that the flood has arrived, but even to-day Christians and Mohammedans alike say that a divine drop falls in the night of June 17th. No inventor has ever stifled the creative imagination of man.

As the high water comes to Lower Egypt in the height of



[Lehnert & Landrock]

THE NILE BELOW ASSOUAN



summer, the parched fields could be fertilized by the silt: as the winter is mild without being tropical, the wheat germinates of itself. Thus the Abyssinian flood reaches Egypt at the most favourable moment, while Mesopotamia is flooded at the wrong time. How long a wave takes on its life-journey may be seen by the fact that high water sets in on the Upper Nile in April, but only in June at Assouan and in July in the delta.

For thousands of years, most of all this water was allowed to run off unused into the sea. Not until the dam in Assouan and its Egyptian brothers arose, not until our century was it possible so to irrigate the higher land on the Nile that broad stretches now bear two and three crops, while behind them, the desert itself grows fruitful.

XXI

From time immemorial, those who live on mountain brooks have raised anxious eyes to their neighbour higher up, questioning whether he is using too much water, or whether he will divert some of it, and the laws of all lands protect the lower settler from the encroachments of the upper where both live in the same country. If the source of the stream belonged to the individual in whose territory it rises, irrigation would be impossible, for all property, all the wheels which once turned themselves, and are now turned indirectly by the turbines, would be in danger: the factories lie below on the roads, not up in the mountains. But what if a whole country were dependent on a gigantic brook, not only for its drinking water, but for the corn that feeds its inhabitants? What if the brook rose in a foreign country? Must not the thoughts of the ruler below on the delta search the mind of the ruler

at the source, seeking to discover whether he will leave the young stream unmolested? And what will they do if hostility breaks out between them, and the settler above maliciously diverts the source? There is no fear of punishment to restrain him, for in actual fact, the existence of an international irrigation law is as fictitious as the functioning of any real international law.

Thus the ancient Egyptians looked upstream just as anxiously as those of to-day to that distant, unknown Ethiopian people, into whose hands God had given the source of the Blue Nile, and with it the great waters of the flood and the fruitful silt without which Egypt withers away. Legends and inscriptions bear witness to struggles and parleys between those dwelling below and those dwelling above. This strange situation has created a fear bordering on folly.

Once, history tells us, in 1106, when the flood did not come to Egypt, and famine threatened the people, the Sultan dispatched a Prince Michael, Patriarch of the Copts, laden with gifts, to visit, as a Christian, the Christian Emperor of Abyssinia. Then the Emperor, moved by gold and pity, caused the little dam to be broken through by which, according to the story, he had diverted the Upper Abbai, and at once the flood plunged down to the Soudan, rising three inches daily. But Michael was received with great honour at the end of the flood in the delta, for he had travelled more slowly than the water. Thus the Sultan feared that the white Christians might deliver Egypt into the hands of their brother, the Archpriest, but at the same time that very Archpriest and Emperor feared that the Sultan might fall upon him so as to secure the Nile for ever. Thus the river, after all its swamps and moors, had to flow through the swamps of religious wars, half master, half servant of a world of thought as alien to

its mission as the volcanic mud was alien to the teaching of the prophets.

In his silken tent—so we read of an audience in Cairo in 1488—the Sultan reclined on his divan, and the ambassadors of all the white powers kissed the ground twice before him. But the ambassador of the Negus was borne in on his litter, ignored the command to rise, and reclining on his litter like the Sultan, asked:

“Lord, will you have peace with your lord and mine, the Archpriest John?”

“My fathers were always at peace with that priest.”

“Say not, ‘that priest,’ say ‘my lord.’”

And when this preposterous demand had been repeated three times, the Sultan said slowly:

“It is my wish to be at peace with my lord, the Archpriest John.”

Then the Abyssinian presented the Sultan of Egypt with a bow and six golden arrows, saying:

“It is well for you to say ‘my lord.’ In his hands lie your life and your death. You ask why? From our land comes the Nile. If my lord wished, he could cut off your water, and you would all perish of thirst.”

“It is true,” said the Sultan.

Even Gibbon explained blackmail of this sort by the trickery of the Copts, the pride of the Abyssinians and the ignorance of the Turks.

But it was a Christian and an occidental who turned the ancient legend into fact. Alfonso d’Albuquerque, so-called great, a Portuguese of high standing in India, desirous of getting the ancient trade-routes out of the hands of the Sultan and hence ruining Egypt, supported moreover by the Archpriest John, attempted to divert the Blue Nile to the Red Sea, and, according to his son’s report, only failed for lack

of skilled labour: otherwise he would have "cut through a little rise in the land and Egypt would have dried up."

Even to-day, five hundred years later, the most recent books describe the plan as well within the bounds of possibility, although we know that the greater part of the water comes not from a river which could be diverted, but from a hundred ungovernable torrents which reach the Blue Nile much farther down. Because it is a blessing and a danger, research with measurements and calculations set in much earlier on the Blue Nile than the White, such calculations were going on in 1930, and will be going on to-morrow.

For thirty years past, a dam at Lake Tana has been contemplated and even designed. As long as Abyssinia was independent, and, by means of slavery, could hold off the curse of foreign loans, it could not be forced to grant concessions. Garstin, whose calculations on the Nile still form the main basis of all questions of water-supply, therefore moved England, in 1902, to conclude a treaty with the Negus according to which the latter shall neither build nor allow anything to be built on the Upper Abbai without consulting England and Egypt. Italy acknowledged the privileged position of England in 1919 and 1925 in exchange for guarantees in West Abyssinia, should a dam ever be built—the modern form of stealing in colonies going under the name of "spheres of influence." For a long time France sought to fan the growing suspicions of the Abyssinian ruler; to-day—in the summer of 1935—she has changed her policy.

When England, in 1927, proposed to supply the Abyssinians with money for a dam so as to increase the irrigation of her Soudanese cotton, the Emperor, supported by three Nile countries, took refuge with the Americans, and had a dam designed by an American firm. England saw the danger that American money might affect the Nile in the interests of

American cotton kings, and preferred to join forces with them. The world crisis put a stop to the whole scheme.

Thus every great power fears the dam on Lake Tana, which will be built all the same one day, out of jealousy of every other. The Abyssinians in the capital fear it, because with it the foreigner would enter the country, and no one knows when he would leave it again: the people on Lake Tana, led by their priests, say that the foreigners who came surveying there wanted to build a dam a hundred yards high, and thus overthrow their churches and divert the Abbai: the foreigners, they say, had already poisoned Lake Tana. The only people to regard the scheme with composure are those who once regarded Abyssinia with dread—the Egyptians, for they know to-day that a dam at Lake Tana can deprive them of no water, since only three per cent of the Egyptian water comes from this lake: above all, it cannot deprive them of the silt they live on, for that does not come from the lake at all.

But a dam at Lake Tana would store three milliard cubic metres of water for Egypt and at the same time for the Gezira in the Soudan. Once Egypt has built all the dams on the White Nile, all the water stored at Lake Tana could flow to the Gezira, and thus, except for floodtime and winter, the Blue Nile will one day be a completely Soudanese, the White Nile a completely Egyptian river.

The difficulty with the Blue Nile only begins far below the lake. As the highlands from which the water comes belong to Abyssinia, 85 per cent of all the waters of the Blue Nile flow into it from the rising rivers and brooks of that country, and are much too diffuse ever to be dammed.

Given this situation, Great Britain preferred for the moment to take her water from where it belonged to her and to build a dam low down on the Blue Nile two hundred miles above

its mouth at Khartoum; this would raise the river bed, dam the river, and irrigate the cotton with the water storage. It was soon after the brilliant success of the Assouan dam, for such constructions set fashions, like books or dictators: people were rich and enterprising, the factories in Manchester wanted to get free of America, and tradition too was there, under whose shadow the English are prone to creep when they have to carry the prudence of their fellow-citizens over the dangers of an innovation. For on the Gezira, cotton had been planted for a hundred years. This solid land, called an "island"—in Goethean terms, a "non-island"—forms a triangle with Khartoum at its apex, the two Niles as long sides and the short side running through the plain from Kosti to Sennar: with its area of five million acres, it is half as big as Switzerland and nearly as big as the whole cultivated land of Egypt.

But this cotton grown by the natives was as poor as that growing half wild in the fields of Abyssinia to-day: it could never compete with the good species, for not only were skill and technology lacking in the Gezira, but water too. Uncertain rains watered the fields sporadically, in patches, at the wrong time and insufficiently. If the water from above, the sub-tropical rain, could be supplemented by water from below, the natural rain-showers between May and September would be extremely favourable: sesame and rubber once flourished here. At the beginning of the century, excellent crops were raised by means of huge pumps, and Kitchener, anxious for fame and money for the land of his deeds, brought his decisive influence to bear on the Government to guarantee a loan so that a dam might be built in Sennar (Makwar). In 1913 it was designed, in 1914 it was to have been begun, it was postponed by the war, in 1925 it was finished. It was to have cost three million pounds, it cost thirteen and a half millions. This dam, a wall of stone, is two miles long: it takes

a good hour to walk along it and back. This shows how difficult it is to achieve on a river the results a lake produces of itself. At Lake Tana, with a dam a hundred yards long and six feet high, three times as much water could be stored as here at Sennar with a dam thirty times as long and eight times as high. And yet even this quantity would be enough to supply London with water for two years.

But here the stored water is not, as in Egypt, passed through the sluices in fixed quantities: here a system of canals, unique in the world in its completeness, takes up part of the water and distributes it over a third part of the Gezira. The main canal, over sixty miles long, runs parallel to the river, but cuts off its bends, and, seen from the aeroplane, forms a logical, clear, straight line which looks as if it were trying to refute the romantic whims of nature. These canals, which are easily cut out of the stoneless soil of the Gezira, are, with the exception of the main canal, all narrow, and grow quickly narrower: the smallest can be jumped over, but they aggregate a length of nine thousand four hundred miles, that is, twice the length of the White and Blue Niles together, or eight times the length of the Swiss frontier. All this water is taken away from nobody for, until ten years ago, it flowed unused into the sea.

So accurately are these canals laid out that the engineer can fill the farthest, narrowest field canal on a definite day with a definite quantity of water according to the increase of the rain in the Abyssinian highlands. When, in the second half of July, the main canal has been filled from the basin to a level proportionate to the rising flood, it can then distribute its water over a period up to nine months.

It is a Faustian picture. No scepticism towards colonies with their outbursts of waywardness and their concealed slavery, no reflections on the bliss of the man vegetating in

God's sun, idle and serene, not yet turned into a factory hand by the machine, can lessen one's admiration for the brains which proved themselves a match for the elements. Here, in the Gezira, the Soudanese, for a thousand years a Mohammedan, for a hundred a cotton-planter, had been a slave of the Fung, the "Blue Sultan," and thus had long since been expelled from his Paradise. What the white man has done for him here must enrich him in every respect: even the young men realize that. It is true that the lands were blessed with dhurra in good rain years so that the Gezira was called the granary of the Soudan, but only one year in ten was a good year. Meanwhile, even we have seen these fields dusty and pitiful. The women were clever at cotton-picking, but the cotton only grew when Allah would, and that was not always.

When the native was told of the new forms his life was to take, he was startled, and when the Government, after years of work, had produced a kind of Domesday Book, assessing the peasants' rent on a basis of the average for forty years, he grew really afraid, for as the land was squared out in blocks of ten acres, separated by canals, thousands could not find their old plots again, and many of the elders may well have turned bitter thoughts towards the bringers of their new fortune.

But then came the surprise. It may have been the children and the women who first curiously pulled the plug out of the hole in their canal to see what would happen and watched, laughing, how the water was watering their crops for them. Was it really flowing on to the roots of itself? They ran to the next canal, ten minutes off—there too it was overflowing, and now, when they sowed field after field with cotton seed and corn, which the white men had given them in sacks, when, at new year, the bloom began and was purer, the flakes even

than before, and the wool fell white into their hands, they sat down in front of their straw huts, learnt how to clean the cotton better than their mothers had done, the men filled it into the sacks, one of them stamping it down firmly in the sacks, the camels were standing ready to carry two huge sacks each, one on each side, to the railway station which the white man had built close by, and then the cotton rolled away from the Gezira to the Red Sea, and from there, they said, far across the ocean to that other Gezira, from which the masters of the stone dam and the field canals had come.

The son of the woman who picked the cotton will learn in the elementary school what water-storage, dam, and canal mean, and if he is a bright boy, he can get as far as Gordon College, down in the big town of Khartoum, and a few years later, he will be measuring earth temperatures in the Gezira or working out flood tables. Then he will earn one hundred and fifty piastres a month, live in a stone house and drive himself home at night. Since we always ask whether he will be the happier for it, we must distinguish him from his brother who has lived on in the tradition of his forefathers, afraid of work, and yet is made happier too by the dam, for now in harvest-time, he can earn in three days the three shillings that his father earned per month, and the next twenty-seven days to the next full moon he can lie about doing nothing or spend his time with the women. As it is difficult to get a number of these tribes to work, and the English are no slave-owners, labour has to be imported into the Gezira from the outside.

Here the Mecca pilgrims, who have crossed Africa to make the pilgrimage to the Prophet's tomb, come in exceedingly useful. Coming from the west coast, they are more used to field labour than the half-Arab cowherds here, and when they have deposited their tents and goats on the banks of the

Nile, they are glad to stay six months in the Gezira to earn the money for the rest of their journey. For all their missionaries, the English find this pagan faith highly convenient, for the fanatical pilgrims are good workmen, and if they mingle with the native women—so much the better for the race which, here as everywhere, is freshened up by mixture.

The area which has been irrigated in the Gezira up to the present is only a third of the land proposed for irrigation. The cotton grown here amounts only to a fifth part of the cotton from the Egyptian delta, the species are different, and as for their quality, experts say in turn "much better," "much poorer." But the dry heat, the moderate rainfall in the early time of growth, the drought during the setting of the pods and at harvest-time, the ventilation of the soil, have produced a high-class "cotton soil," superior to that between the Euphrates and the Tigris, where the artificially irrigated cotton island is also known as El Djezira. In good years, four hundredweight and more per acre has been picked on the Blue Nile.

The first years after the opening of the dam were too good. The syndicate, which takes 40 per cent of the proceeds, spoilt the Government, which receives 35 per cent, like a young wife in an old-fashioned marriage when things go too well at the start and she can be as extravagant as she likes. The twenty thousand families, too, of the so-called "tenants," who, in the same way as in Soviet Russia, were turned from proprietors into part owners in a community, were delighted with the sewing-machines and gramophones by which they sent their money back to England again, and the cotton kings came here into Central Africa to buy the cotton in the pod. Every acre yielded up to £30 net profit, the reserve fund grew, the Soudanese Government could transform a million pounds a year into schools, roads, sanitation; there was great

haste to prepare further land for the water. The lack of labour was so serious that speculators, enraged by the god-like indolence of the natives, conceived the hope, which they went so far as to have printed, that the "gastric fever would soon destroy the cattle, and force the nomads to field-labour, and that the tse-tse flies would soon kill the Dinka herds and thus send the children of the herdsmen of to-day cotton-picking."

But then, as in the Bible, the lean years suddenly followed, only that in our world crisis, they set in after only four fat ones. When, in 1929, the area of irrigated land had greatly increased, cotton prices suddenly fell, there were no buyers, instead of £30, the acre yielded only £7, the rain, which had once been so favourable for the corn, now struck the cotton too heavily and not at the right time, doubling the weeds and spreading disease.

For disease, in an uncanny way, followed the dam, the cotton, and the gold to which it gave birth. Bilharziasis, a severe parasitic affection, which had broken out before the completion of the dam in the Dongola province, and been carried to Sennar by western pilgrims, then ague, malaria, and small-pox—all spread, to the horror of the people, who saw their suspicions of the machines confirmed by Allah's wrath. In 1930, many thousands of sick passed through the Soudanese hospitals. Science and practice advanced vigorously from Khartoum against the pests; the locusts, which lay their eggs in light sand, were attacked by an army of chemists, policemen, and Arabs, who, by means of poison and rapidly dug trenches, endeavoured to keep the insects away from the crops. But when an aeroplane circled overhead, bringing fresh medicines from England, the natives looked up angrily and said that all the evil came from the aeroplanes.

Here lies the terrible warning that will again thunder

towards us in Egypt. It is true that the world crisis, rain, and sickness have upset a reckoning that at first seemed good and brought in big profits. But what good is a new raw material to a country which, to export it, has to go without the bread which was its natural portion for thousands of years, and for the increase of which the dams and canals, the tractors and the engineers' brains would have been admirably employed?

XXII

In Khartoum, where the two brothers stream together, to which for the last time we must now return with cold figures, the wilder, younger of them, swollen with all the floods of Abyssinia, hurls itself against the other with such force that it stems its flow for three months, and even drives it back a short stretch, just as the Sobat did with the same. White Nile But this natural check corresponds exactly to Egypt's need, for just when abundance reigns there, the water from above decreases and a great deal can pour into the sea unused: the White Nile, oppressed by the reckless power of the Blue, cannot flow on, but saves its strength for those winter months of drought in Egypt. Then, when the other is exhausted, it will bring its help downstream. Such is the symbol under which the characters of the two brothers unfold.

The phenomenon of this natural water-storage has given the engineers the idea of turning the natural basin of the White Nile into an artificial one, much in the same way as is thought of for Lake Tana or Lake Albert—that is, to prolong the stoppage by a dam, and thus to hold up the water-supply thus saved for Egypt from winter till spring, when there is more need of it than in winter. At the same

time, this would safeguard Egypt against the floods which have often caused damage there. The element, which is now too weak, now too strong, would in this way be released or restrained according to Egypt's needs.

This simple idea, put forward by English experts, has fanned to flame the passion of Egyptian national feeling. Their cry is that to dam the Nile in the Soudan would be simply to facilitate by mechanical means the old danger of thirst—it would simply tempt the owner to misuse. With this cry of warning, millions of Egyptians have been won over to the anti-English cause, whole elections have turned on the dam, the King and his ministers were accused of treachery to their own people for permitting the dam to be built and even promising to pay for it. This dam, it was said, would become the most powerful weapon in England's hands if ever a conflict should break out between Egypt, which is under English power, and the Soudan, which is under English rule.

The dam at Gebel Aulia, thirty miles above Khartoum, where a limestone dike running straight across the Nile bed made building easy, is now under construction: it is to be ready in 1937. It will certainly be to Egypt's benefit. It might become a weapon in England's hands, but not to starve Egypt with. The excitement of people who see the key to their lives in foreign hands is not difficult to understand, but reason must in time cast out fear. Suppose war or the threat of war were to mislead England, with the approval of public opinion, to indulge in this kind of terrorization—quite an un-English thing—suppose even that England's interests in Egypt were not sufficient to restrain her from such an act of violence, then, by retarding or preventing the passage of this spring water to Egypt she could do some harm to Egypt, but she could never cut off the river, for then the Upper Nile valley

would be flooded, the spread of the water would bring disease with it, and agriculture would be hindered, not helped.

In 1926, when the Egyptian Wafd, the national party, interrupted the preparations for the dam at Gebel Aulia, their advisers declared that the raising of the dam at Assouan would have the same result, and that water could be stored there for Egypt on Egyptian territory till spring. Their distrust was increased by a certain eagerness on the part of the English, whose first thought is the profit they would make on the dam as its builders, and who cannot deny the advantage to the Soudan. In all treaties, however, the latest being dated 1929, England has given the Egyptians every solemn pledge not to undertake anything on the Nile which might adversely affect the quantity, level, or date of the arrival of the Nile water in Egypt.

After endless debates both things happened: the old dam of Assouan was heightened, but the scheme of the new one at Gebel Aulia was taken up again, for the latter can work the whole year round without the risk of being silted up, since the White Nile leaves all its silt behind in the swamps. What is being built to-day is helping to secure Egypt's future.

Further schemes will be carried out in the course of the next twenty years. No river on earth is so intently observed as the Nile; hydrological research costs £100,000 a year, and the river becomes more important, and at the same time more difficult in proportion as the statistics of its discharge, the numbering of its peoples, the demands of hygiene, and the research into its last unknown territory increase. Thus it has been calculated that even the dams of Gebel Aulia, Lake Albert and Lake Tana cannot fully develop both Egypt and the Soudan at the same time. Further dams will be needed at the Nile sources or on the Victoria Nile, the Baro will

have to be regulated before its inflow into the Sobat, and the whole system of the Ghazal too. And even then, only three-quarters of the reserve necessary for bad years could be stored.

Thus the Nile to-day resembles the treasury of a state which finds it ever harder to make ends meet as its population grows, because it has to import the greatest of all raw materials, water, and cannot increase by labour or any taxation of its inhabitants the quantity it has striven to turn to good account by perpetually supplementing and re-distributing it.

XXIII

The Nile's struggle with man was decided in Assouan: only so mighty a work could conquer the mighty river. Everything about this greatest dam in the world is reminiscent of the Pharaohs—its rise, its use, its effect. If Napoleon had encountered an opponent of the same calibre as the Nile, we should take his outward defeat more calmly. But even the Nile, like every great character, really perishes by reason of its own nature, and the dam of Assouan can take advantage of the weakness of the element, that is, of the irregularities of the wilder of the two Niles.

When, in the nineteenth century B.C., a Pharaoh on the Lower Nile built a dam on Lake Moeris, he seems to have stored approximately as much water as the one designed at the end of the nineteenth century A.D. There are reports in classical times of similar works in China and India. The height of the dam at Assouan is exceeded by other dams, but no dam can compare with it as regards the quantity of water stored: the great Soviet dams have other objects, and the "Hoover" dam in America is only now in building. The biggest dam in Switzerland stores 140,000,000 cubic metres,

the biggest in Europe, situated in Spain, 1,200,000,000, the biggest in America up to the present, 3,500,000,000. In Assouan, 5,000,000,000 cubic metres are stored, hence the backflow here reaches two hundred and twenty-five miles upstream to Wadi Halfa.

Its purposes are as unique as its dimensions. A large number of all dams on earth are power-stations, and hence are constructed and paid for by contractors whose object is to produce light or power: only about one-tenth serve to regulate the water-supply. On the Nile, a work was conceived which would increase the cultivable land of a whole country by a third, later by a half, and would protect a people of fifteen million souls from the hunger due to threatening over-population. To this work was assigned the Faustian task of transforming the fringes of the desert into fertile land—a region which, with its twenty thousand square miles, will be bigger than Switzerland. All that was and is only feasible because Egypt has no neighbours and because the land above Assouan, that is, the land of the artificial lake, is sparsely inhabited, so that its inhabitants can be compensated for being flooded out; the water will certainly submerge their homeland—an incommensurable quantity, like the beauty of the Temple of Philae.

The idea of Assouan is as old as Egypt, but only last century turned it into a practical proposition, and again, it was no professional, but the amateur of genius who, with the simplicity of the layman, challenged the future. In 1867, Baker recommended the building of a dam in Assouan, exclaiming, "As nature has formed a dam, and is still forming it why should not science, with its mighty powers, form a delta?" At that time, there were few of our modern dams in existence to make the problem look easy of solution: in this case the experiment was forthwith begun on the biggest scale.

Willcocks, a daring engineer, whose energy sprang from

the faith in his heart, designed the work in the nineties, and, the British Government having turned the enterprise down, he and his friends contrived to inspire an equally daring financier. This was Sir Ernest Cassel, who, with the naïveté and pertinacity of the Englishman, combined the wariness of the Jew, and came, a second Joseph, to Egypt to develop the land as a foreigner. This man, who knew more about the power of money than about the power of the elements, to whom the wilderness and fog of the London Stock Exchange were more familiar than the wilderness of the cataracts and the miasma of the swamps on the Upper Nile, stood one day with maps and plans in his hands on the bank of the rapids of Assouan, and while the pencils of the engineers were busy with calculations of water-displacements, sluice-tables, and rates of discharge, he was adding up the costs dictated to him, and, as a sceptic of experience, adding 50 per cent for unexpected eventualities. A shrewd business man, such as one half of Joseph was, he left the parable of the other half to the dreamers at his side, who, in their imagination, already heard the water thundering through the sluices. Then he said, "All right. Go ahead."

And soon both banks of the Nile were teeming as in the times of the Pharaohs. The peoples here assembled, the colours, sounds, and smells rising to the pitiless sun of this rainless land, the accuracy of a construction which was to rise from the middle of the desert, incomprehensible to the thousand naked men making it, merely at the behest of an invisible king—all this renewed, after a lapse of three thousand years, the image of the building of the pyramids: the same naked workers, the same hard overseer, the same colossal stones, the same granite—only that the slaves were paid instead of being fed and that more ingenious machines took the heaviest of the burdens from human shoulders.

But here no god-king's illusion of immortality was satisfied, no tomb was built for an individual by the modern slaves who were no whit more mortal than that king. Here one man was working for millions of men, designing for them a construction which was to overcome no natural law, but merely tame a natural power and compel the ruling element to creative achievement. After three thousand years, those gloomy pyramids on the fringe of the Nile, in which the exaltation of lonely kings had sought to conquer death, were followed by a work of life, full of promise, which was to win new land from the desert, and bring to the old a threefold harvest. And yet the spectacle of the second work, as it rose, was as Pharaonic as that of the first had been.

Into the chaos of this desert of stone and water, there penetrated one morning the sound of the first oar-beat of the first boat, to reduce to order, as on the first day of creation, the world that was without form and void. It was in spring, the water was at its lowest. Strange sounds came from the boat to the shore: "Bab el Harun! Bab el Kabir! Bab el Sughair!" Those were three of the five great waterfalls which dominated the cataract, against whose dangers the natives had been warned from time immemorial. Now they were to set about surrounding the lowest of them as they surround the crocodile, which rarely appears down here, yet not with spears but with rocks, which they were shifting at its feet, with a substructure of stones, draining off the first block of stone with pumps. Naked, a hundred men stood in the water to cement this first dry spot, for on it the great elephant was to be set up which would lift the hugest of the stones and carry them away. Through the middle of the chaos, it was brought along on a boat, and, with infinite toil, erected on the dry spot.

But now it began to shift blocks of stone with its trunk which, long ago, we do not know how, a thousand arms

pushed before them inch by inch, day and night, when the Pharaohs, to their own glory, had obelisks cut out of the granite, one of which lies unfinished on the shore to this very day. But the iron giant swung its supple-jointed trunk on all sides, raising and lowering it at the command of its master, creaking and rattling, yet with the same elastic power as its great model, which, far up on the young Nile, tears trees up by the roots to feed on their uppermost fruits. The crane was there, and a hundred cranes arrived, great and small, rolling on to the growing dam, and, like a colony of Cingalese elephants, they obeyed the will of their tamer who had calculated every detail.

For that first dam had only been a temporary one, *en miniature*, to shut off a single waterfall, Bab el Harun, but it had taken two months for the first pile to stand and nine yards of smooth surface to be laid on which the first rails could rest. In their long white shirts, the men came on great black boats, tens of thousands of Nubians and Egyptians, different in colour and features, alike in their Mohammedan robes, heaving the heaviest stones on their bent backs, hampered at every step by their trailing trousers, which, in the evening, they took off and washed again in the Nile. The water they had set out to fight spent itself like a great lord on his enemy, for drinking, cooking, bathing, washing, making mortar, driving the machines.

Over on the right bank, in the blazing heat, rarely sheltered by thatched roofs, a few thousand Nubians sat hewing the white and pink syenitic granite—the ancient city of Syene once stood here—in great blocks out of the mountain, and beside them, the more skilful hands of eight hundred Italians chipped the blocks into shape, so that they should fit into the courses of the dam: it was the same mountain and the same stone that Pharaoh had once brought down the Nile

on boats for his temple columns. Then the Nubians dragged stones to the railway line, and rolled them on a narrow-gauge line to the river and to the place on the bank where other hundreds of hands cast them into the boats, which bore them with softly-swelling sails to the beginnings of the dam.

The boats lie in rows under the lee of the newly fixed blocks, surrounded by naked bodies half out of the water—a single picture of rock, arms, and water. A hundred Nubians in white shirts, mournfully chanting, lift gigantic sacks of cement out of the boats, while a troop of Egyptians push iron rods upwards, and in a dark corner, guarded by a whip, a group of convicts from the prison haul along in baskets the coal to heat the cranes, which has had to be shifted by hand six times on its journey from Newcastle to the Middle Nile. Beside a troop of Soudanese, flapping their arms to keep warm, for they shiver till nine o'clock, the white engineer is fanning himself, for he begins to perspire at eight, as he works with his sextants, whose leather case the brown boy behind him fingers enviously, thinking what a fine pair of shoes it would make. While a nimble, busy pump ceaselessly draws sand out of a place in the river, bent backs carry sacks from the other side with fresh sand for the cement, and the men boring the troublesome stone under water, ready to blast it away, no longer look at their brothers beside them dragging up blocks of other stone. A spectator without faith in a creative will above the confusion could not but regard the whole as madness.

On the other side of the antediluvian silence of these stone Mountains of the Moon, above at Philae, beyond the water softly lapping about the blocks, there rises, where the dam is growing, a confused noise—rumbling, shouting, the rushing of water: iron scratches as it is dragged across the freshly

made surface, boring machines, driven by compressed air, burrow into the rock, the cutting-machines whirl and grind, there are sudden gusts of explosions, a thousand hammers echo and re-echo, little stones, on a sloping wood track, hop and rattle back into the water, the hinges of the machines scream like cats. In anxious wonder, a few ibises call warnings to each other, and as they fly away upstream to the capitals of the temple, their cries and the beat of their wings sound clearly audible through the din, for it has the charm of a slight irregularity, like all the sounds of nature.

And yet the whole displays no haste or excitement—on the contrary, it all looks serene: seen from a distance, a Pharaonic festival might be in preparation. The crowd screams, as at most festivals, merely because a single man has taken it upon himself to declare that what he is doing is important. But he, the hero and king of the festival, is the snow-white engineer, and though his helmet is nothing but cork and linen, his shield nothing but a huge block of stone, and his sword nothing but a compass, he still stands out as the master because he hauls nothing, does not get dirty, and commands in silence with a pointing forefinger: a great gravity, moreover, seems to separate him from the childish emotions of the crowd. The rock on which he stands—beside it lies his motor-boat with the Union Jack—is now being examined for the third morning for leaks, to see how much water trickles through, and whether the little spring has really been sealed with cement so that the little drop of water that percolates through all the same will not eat away the piles from below, for here one of the great piles is to rest.

Thus a surgeon, with intent gravity, swabs the ever-welling blood with cotton-wool pads, and, wonders for all his experience whether he can sew the wound up to-day. Take care! The life and security of the whole organism,

leaving the hand of God or man, depends on this decision—perhaps the subterranean spring will take its revenge, for if one pile is unsteady, the whole work will tremble. There he stands in the midst of the thousandfold movement, which he has set going like a master conspirator from his quiet room: his gaze, fixed downwards, shows that his ears have ceased to hear, and if a telegram is brought to him, he stuffs it into his pocket and again fixes his eyes on that dangerous crack, that split through which he must divine the soul of the rock.

Nor does he see the rainbow which, slanting before him, links the fading chaos with the growing work, for here it appears everywhere, this familiar spirit of the waterfalls, as if trying to outshine all this creation of numbers with its magic. But the white Pharaoh sees nothing, jumps into his motor-boat, points east, and ten minutes later is sitting in the little room where a hundred plans hang on whitewashed walls, finger-prints of nature, following the junction of every rock with its neighbour in the stony depths. Now, with abstruse figures, he works out the bearing-power of that very problematic rock which, if the crack alters it, can cause the towering pile to burst and with one wild wave destroy the meaning of the whole work. Then he decides to send down the diver to the root of the rock.

There is no time to lose, for eight piles must be standing before the next flood—that is laid down in the plan and the calculations, which, inexorable as the laws of the Pharaohs, have issued from the little whitewashed room, from the brains of half a dozen men.

For this reason, the work that is to tame the water obeys only the laws of the water, not those of the light, and while, after sunset, ten thousand men lie down on their straw mats in their tents on the bank, ten thousand others sail out into

the radiantly illuminated night on little boats, on great lighters, and even roll on trolleys along the finished piece of the dam to prolong the festival of labour on into the night.

Now the great iron elephants loom up black on the growing bridge before the flashing blueish reflexes of the arc-lamps, and the indefatigable trunks gingerly raise sacks of hewn stones, then lower them into barges which, tied together to form a flotilla, are drawn off by a solitary little steamer into a dark corner of the night. Below, in the shadow of the quay-like bridge or wall, on a third of the river's breadth, a greedy dragon at the feet of the elephant seems to be protecting its brood, hissing, against the attack of the thousand arms, flashing faintly as its breast heaves: it is the cement-mixer, whose lid rises and falls with the sand, for it is insatiable, this dragon, devours sacks and chests of sand, and the water must now help to bind the cement which is to conquer it, for in the coolness of the night it mixes better with the stones heaped up in the daytime.

Where the first half-piers loom in the darkness like broken columns, like signs of a mighty antiquity, in a kind of defiant impotence, black figures hover on gently swaying boards in the growing gigantic windows, apparently cleaning the stones of the bridge close above their heads, as if the golden king were coming on the morrow with his glittering boat: in sober fact they are stopping up the still open gaps with grey asphalt, for after the last finishing touches, every pile must rest four months and all the sand from Assouan runs through the hour-glass of time. At his feet, a block is being drawn out of the dry river bed by shouting men, who have bound it about with ropes, as if it were a hippo they were dragging off to kill.

But over their heads, high above the surface of the bridge, a boy is floating in a rocking box on the trunk of the elephant:

at every turn he has to reverse a lever, and seems to be playing with the arc lamp near him. Nearer the light than all the others, freed from the law of gravity, master of the dam and the night, he is the true Pharaoh of the noisy festival.

XXIV

Thus the great orgy of labour went on in the middle of the Nile for three years, more than a thousand days and nights, half interrupted only by the flood, and while the labyrinth of rocks and the uproar of the elements, of machines and men, was slowly transformed into the straight line of the dam, the designers and leaders of the work returned to their pretty new bungalows close to their work. Their gardens on the Nile bank, into which they contrived to lead the first silt before so much as one Egyptian field received it, rose under the hands of their black servants, and under the orders of their wives, the desert was transformed as quickly into red and white oleander groves as the rock bed into the stone dam under their own.

When these lords of the new creation returned at midday from the glaring light into the coolness of their carefully shaded homes, the ancient drama of Venus and Mars was renewed, varied à l'*anglaise* with tea and sandwiches, which they could not dispense with even on the Tropic of Cancer. The romance which flourished in this oasis was born of a life endangered by heat and nervous tension, loneliness and friction, the life of a little community of a hundred souls surrounded only by elements and slaves. Contractors to whom part of the work had been allotted broke down because a rock fall destroyed their reckoning, and once, when the dam

was heightened, a famous engineer was so much out in his calculations that, in his despair, he went to Alexandria, took a boat, and drowned himself at the mouth of the river which had given him its curse, but not its glory. For when the dam was finished, it was too low: the whole of Egypt was crying out for water in the spring, the gigantic basin was too small, and so, in 1912, and again in 1933, the dam was raised by a total of fifty feet, its height having first been reckoned at one hundred and twenty. In the dispute over the costs, Willcocks, the expert, reckoned that the cost of £4,200,000 would only have amounted to £2,500,000 if the Government had built the dam itself, a striking refutation of the old capitalistic claim that private capital always works more cheaply than the state.

The dam gained in beauty as it gained in height: the piers were incorporated throughout into a stronger wall: the bridges above were so much widened that a projecting profile beautifies their line. As it was possible for the building to use the weaker pink granite where the pressure of wind and water is less, that is in the north, the stranger approaching from Assouan sees it shimmering in the distance. In other ways, too, the inexorability of its main theme is softened by unexpected variations, for among its one hundred and eighty sluices, separate groups of four are opened in apparently irregular succession, and there the water gushes out, foaming, like a four-in-hand which has been pawing the ground behind the gate. Only the engineer in charge, sitting in his white cell at the west end of the dam, knows how many sluices he must open, which, and why.

For while he keeps the sluices shut from November till January, so as to fill the basin after the flood, he must still provide for a certain flow of water to Egypt. Then, from April to July, by opening more and more sluices, he empties

the basin, and in these three months sends six milliard cubic metres of water to Egypt. Here supply and demand are balanced with such accuracy that on many a day the number and height of the sluices opened have to be altered as much as twelve times. It is true that each of the iron sluices can easily be moved from the dam with a wheel, a child can set loose the power of the foaming water and bind it again. But the artificial lake stands in eternal stillness on the other side of the dam, and only the levels of its surface would allow a spectator unable to turn north to guess what is going on on the other side: the higher the water rises on the inner edge of the dam, the lower sink the columns of the Temple of Philae on the other side.

But on that July day on which the flood comes, and the engineer, within a few days, opens all his one hundred and eighty sluices, the surface on the other side sinks instead of rising, and the columns of Philae rise again with mud-dripping feet from their bath. Now the silt is passed down to Egypt, and thus the system of the sluices is protected from silting up. Egypt owes to the dam its perennial irrigation with seven million acres yielding two to three crops, while twelve hundred thousand acres still live on the old basin system and reap only once.

In the midst of his figures and lists, tables and diagrams, the engineer in his cell is like the manager of a savings bank whose cashiers bring him daily the accounts of payments and withdrawals. With the nine telegrams from the White Nile up to Malakal, from the Blue up to Roseires, which he finds waiting every morning, he can calculate how much water will flow into the basin that day, that is, how much it will rise at the dam, for he knows that a wave of the Nile takes forty-four days from Malakal to Assouan, but at the same time the needy in the land are rattling at his cash-boxes, demanding

water for the capital they have given in the form of taxes for the building of the dam.

And yet he too, like the manager of the savings-bank, is dependent on natural events which may upset his plan. Thus the highest and lowest water-levels in Assouan for the same months of 1913 and 1918 differed by 60 per cent, and that was due merely to the White Nile, the steadier of the two brothers. What the wilder will be at when it comes foaming down in July lies on the knees of the gods.

For the vengeance of the conquered element still lurks on the subterranean rocks of the Nile. If man has ventured to lay his hand on the mysterious river, it must never tremble, otherwise the river will break loose. If the engineer in his cell, when the flood has run off, shuts the sluices too quickly, if he shuts too many at once, down in Egypt the embankments collapse, and with them the houses on the embankments. If the stored water, which nearly all comes from the White Nile, contains too much salt, the farmer in Egypt has to set about manuring like his brothers throughout the world, who may receive rain from above, but never receive silt from below. When the Nubian up on the margin of the basin, after the end of the flood, works his old field on the bank, it must grow quickly, before the basin has filled too high again, otherwise the water will flood out his crop.

In olden times the dam of Assouan would have been one of the wonders of the world. It is one to-day. A few decades after Baker, with prophetic vision, saw into the future, it all began to come true. "A time will come," he wrote, "when the world will gaze with admiration on a new Egypt, whose luxuriant cornfields will run over these desolate and sandy wastes into the far distance, where now only the camel can struggle with exhausted nature. From a few elevated points, men will look down upon a network of canals and basins,

and will ask wondering how it came about that the power of the majestic river remained as long concealed as the secret of its source."

The height from which this spectacle unfolds is to-day reached daily by the aeroplane, which reveals the whole land of Egypt in its narrowness, even when flying low: between yellow wastes lies the green strip. But below it, as it whirs over the dam, a long, old boat is moving through the navigation sluice at the western end, recalling the tidings of his dam brought to Faust:

And see, a stately boat advances
Towards us on the great canal.

Faust went blind: he could not see it.

But we can see, as long as eye and heart can inspire us as gifts of God, how the old Nile, at the end of all its adventures, conquered yet wise, calm as an aged philosopher, becomes a source of help to the human beings swarming on its banks, and with carefully hoarded strength, achieves more than was granted to it in the fire of its youth. We see the high sail, the same with which Pharaoh sailed on this river. An arch of six thousand years here spans myth and work, thought and legend, and the wonderful river now flowing down to the sea gains in the last part of its career the colour of all the time it has flowed through, the sounds of all the civilizations it has created, and seen to flower and decay.

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